# SEVENTEEN

# SERMONS,

ON

# PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

## *JOSHUA PARRY,*

OF

CIRENCESTER.

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# PREFACE.

THE Sermons offered to the Publick in the following pages were preached at Cirenceſter in Gloceſterſhire, at the times ſpecified in the Table of Contents. The reader who expects to find in them ſcripture criticiſm, chains of abſtract reaſoning, or examinations of ſpeculative principles, will certainly be diſappointed. On the other hand, ſhould any one ſearch in them for elegant periods and poetical imagery, his ſearch would probably be fruitleſs. They were neither preached by the Author, nor publiſhed by the Editor, to afford ſubjects for metaphyſical diſquiſition, to fill up the vacancy of an idle hour, nor to gratify the careleſs curioſity of an indolent and unoccupied mind. Their original aim was principally to impreſs the heart, in a warm and forcible manner, with truths of acknowledged practical importance; and they were addreſſed to perſons capable of being influenced by the almoſt obſolete doctrines of future rewards and puniſhments. To ſuch they

are

are now offered; and it is ſincerely hoped that they will not be peruſed in vain, although they muſt neceſſarily loſe much of their energy, from being unaccompanied with that nervous oratory with which they were originally pronounced.

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SERMON

# SERMON I.

## ON THE CAUSES OF NEGLECTING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

*HEBREWS* x. 25.

NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS.

THE obligation of public worſhip is ſo indiſpenſible and ſtrong, its uſefulneſs ſo manifeſt, and its pleaſure, when it is rightly performed, ſo great, that it is worthy of aſtoniſhment to ſee rational creatures—creatures too enjoying the advantages and aſſuming the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, wilfully neglect it. And yet ſo it is; there are multitudes who abſent themſelves, either wholly or in part, from the offices of God's houſe, from whom better things might be expected; and who make themſelves eaſy in the omiſſion of ſo plain a duty by the moſt frivolous of all pretences. With ſuch

perſons, the weakeſt temptations have a ſtrong intereſt; and neither the majeſty of God, who is the object of worſhip, nor their own ſalvation, the end of worſhip, makes any impreſſion upon their hearts.

Now a cloſe attendance on public and religious ſervices being ſo generally neglected, and yet being ſo highly requiſite to the maintenance of ſerious piety; it cannot be too frequently inculcated and enforced, and ought to be recommended in every poſſible variety of lights.

We ſee from the text, that even in the days of the Apoſtles there were ſome, who, notwithſtanding the luſtre of the Chriſtian miracles, notwithſtanding the uncommon and ſupernatural gifts of the Apoſtles themſelves, and the peculiar impreſſion which muſt have been made by the very novelty of the goſpel, yet habitually abſented themſelves from the aſſemblies of worſhip. They are imitated by too many in the preſent age, who profeſs, yet neglect Chriſtianity; who own the obligation, yet frequently omit the practice

practice of public worſhip, and have need therefore to be admoniſhed in the words of the ſacred writer.

In conſidering the ſubject, I ſhall examine ſome of the cauſes which influence thoſe perſons, who, though they profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, yet frequently neglect the ſolemnities of public ſervice; and endeavour to ſhew, as I go along, their ſhameful and inexcuſable abſurdity.

There are probably ſome who imagine that they have little or no need of religious and public worſhip. The aſſiſtance of ſuch ſolemnities is only for the weak and ignorant; but as for them, they are far exalted above ſuch low neceſſities; they are ſelf-ſufficient, and have no need of help. This vain notion they entertain with regard to religious inſtruction and devout impreſſion.

They are ſo abundantly furniſhed with religious inſtruction, that it is utterly impoſſible for any one to add to their ſtock of knowledge; and therefore, their attendance

upon public inſtruction is only a loſs of time. They know every thing, and therefore have nothing to learn. They are ſo perfectly acquainted with the doctrines, the precepts, the ſanctions, the evidences, and the whole ſenſe of the Chriſtian revelation; they are ſo thoroughly verſed in the arts of holy living, ſo well apprized of their own diſpoſitions, and ſo guarded againſt temptation, that no one can give them a ſingle hint which may add to their intellectual treaſure.

Now ſuch perſons,—for ſuch perſons may ſometimes be met with,—have either been uncommonly attentive to ſpiritual and divine things, or elſe are bleſt with more than ordinary abilities. They have ſurely been favoured with peculiar ſucceſs, or, according to the expreſſion of the ſacred oracles, they "think themſelves to be ſome-"thing while they are really nothing."

Thoſe who have devoted whole years to the ſtudy of ſacred truth, and have ſpent their lives, with the beſt poſſible helps, in the important purſuit, are ready to confeſs their

their ignorance in many particulars; own themſelves embarraſſed with numerous difficulties, and find that the more they know, the more they are acquainted with their own imperfections.

It is readily acknowledged that the hearers of the goſpel ſhould not, without examining, take any thing for granted which is advanced by thoſe who are appointed to direct and lead them in public ſolemnities. They ſhould cheriſh the ſpirit of the noble Beræans; they ſhould "ſearch the Scrip-"ture, and carefully inquire whether theſe "things are ſo" or not. The claim of implicit faith ſhould be left to the Papiſts, and to thoſe who, imitating the Papiſts, affect the government of conſcience. We have no dominion over your faith, and are only helpers of your joy. But ſtill, public inſtructions ought to be attended; they ſhould be conſidered with ſeriouſneſs, examined with impartiality, and ſtatedly heard, were it only for the ſake of example. Perhaps ſome truth may be taught the hearer, with which he was unacquainted;

ſome circumſtance recollected which he had too much forgotten; ſome point illuſtrated which he imperfectly conceived; and ſome precept or promiſe more ſtrongly enforced which had little affected him before.

For here, in reality, it ought to be conſidered, that the great uſe of public ſervices is not merely to enlighten the head, but to warm and affect the heart. We ſtir up your pure minds by way of remembrance; we ſpeak to your conſciences as nearly as we can; we endeavour to ſtrike the ſenſibilities of your nature, to perſuade as well as convince you.

Suppoſing it certain therefore—and ſurely it is far from being quite certain—that we could never improve in knowledge by public ſervices; yet doubtleſs they may help us to feel more ſtrongly the energy of divine truth, and receive from it impreſſions which may turn out practical and ſaving.

The beauty of holineſs, and the deformity of ſin, the compaſſion of God and our bleſſed Redeemer,

Redeemer, the danger of death, the ſolemnity of judgment, the terrors of future puniſhments, and the tranſports of future rewards;—theſe objects may be repreſented in ſo ſtriking a light as to move our affections in an unuſual manner, obtain the practical conſent of the will, and be admirably uſeful where before they made no impreſſion.

In the mean while, Are thoſe perſons who abſent themſelves from public inſtructions, becauſe they can receive no benefit, employed for their own improvement, and exerting their extraordinary powers for ſacred and ſaving purpoſes? Are the hours which are thought too precious to be ſpent in public devotion, appropriated in ſolitude to divine concerns, to the ſerious contemplation of God's nature and works, to ſelf inquiry, and a preparation for the eternal ſtate? Surely they are never ſquandered away in indolence and ſleep, upon ſinful pleaſures, on low company, and purſuits that were infamous even upon common days. This would be a reproach to theſe perfect

and exalted minds not to be imagined,—a reproach that would bring them down beneath even our level, who are ſuch weak, inſufficient, and neceſſitous creatures, as to want the aſſiſtance of ſocial and public ſervices.

Some perſons may alſo imagine that public worſhip is needleſs to them, with reference even to devout impreſſions. They want not to be affected and improved in their devout feelings, any more than to be inſtructed and advanced in divine knowledge. But this is ſo extraordinary and amazing a claim, that it cannot be credited without extraordinary evidence.

What unuſual devotion, what uncommon inſtances or degrees of virtue do theſe men diſcover, to ſupport ſo ſtrange a pretenſion? Whence comes it that they are more perfect and independent than the reſt of mankind? It is generally the temper of the moſt ſerious Chriſtians to be moſt ſenſible of their own imperfections and wants, to be moſt jealous of their own hearts, and the moſt on their

guard

guard againſt the temptations of life. They uſually acknowledge that the avocations of the preſent ſtate are ſo very deluſive, and themſelves ſo apt to be forgetful, or to loſe the impreſſion of divine things, that they need every aſſiſtance, and every art, to forward them in their ſpiritual concerns. They own that notwithſtanding all their care, watchfulneſs, and attention to private and public devotion, they are ſtill of too worldly a temper, too little affected with infinite objects, and too little diſpoſed to intercourſe with the beſt of beings. Their ſouls, as they too frequently experience, cleave to the duſt; and they frequently therefore intreat their heavenly Father to quicken them according to his word.

Chriſtians! ye who are truly ſerious, who can view with impartiality the receſſes of your own hearts, ye who are moſt experienced, to you I appeal. Are you not ready, even in your leaſt ſinful moments, to bear teſtimony to the truth I advance? Are you not willing to acknowledge the too great influence of temporal things, and to own,

with

with ſuitable humility, that you are not independent of divine appointments? And, finally, will you not with thankfulneſs and admiration declare, that our bleſſed Redeemer knew what was in man, and with equal wiſdom and compaſſion appointed theſe gracious helps? It is not a trifle that ſhall keep you from divine worſhip. It is not a vain excuſe that ſhall detain you from thoſe ſolemnities, which you know to be the ſupport of your integrity, the means of your improvement, and the ſource of your nobleſt comforts.

Beſides thoſe of the characters already mentioned, others are ſometimes withheld from public ſolemnities, not ſo much by an opinion that they are uſeleſs and unprofitable, as by mere indolence. Notwithſtanding the infinite importance of eternal concerns, though their own ſalvation is abſolutely at ſtake, though miracles of mercy are repreſented in the goſpel, and though it earneſtly beſeeches ſinners to be reconciled to God; yet ſleepineſs and inactivity ſhall keep them from it's ſacred miniſtrations, and

detain

detain them in their beds, when they ought to be ſuppliant at the foot of the divine throne. This is a conduct wondrouſly becoming a creature endowed with reaſon. It is likewiſe moſt highly ſuited to the ſtate in which we live, where we are always certain of long life, never expoſed to a ſingle accident, never liable to untimely death, have abundance of time to conſume in ſleep, and may as well converſe with our Maker in dreams and viſions as in prayer and praiſe. One half, at leaſt, of the ſacred day may be thus employed; for it contains too many hours to beſtow upon religion, eſpecially as our ſinful habits are ſo eaſily conquered, good affections ſo eaſily implanted, and endangered by ſo few temptations. The devil too may be ſuppoſed ſometimes to indulge himſelf in ſleep, and our other adverſaries to give themſelves a relaxation from perplexing us with ſnares and trials.

But alas! ſuch behaviour, though infinitely ridiculous, is too dreadful to be ridiculed. Stupid and infamous! Sleep upon the brink of perdition? "Awake, thou

"that

" that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead; and " Chriſt ſhall give thee life." Pardon or indignation, heaven or hell; that is the queſtion. Have you any ſecurity that you ſhall not awake in the ſtate of torments? Would you trifle thus with your temporal concerns? Had you any proſpect of temporal gain; had you any apprehenſion of temporal loſs; were your lives and your ſubſtance in imminent danger; would you thus indulge yourſelves in unſeaſonable repoſe, and waſte the ineſtimable hours? Inexcuſable madneſs! Is there any compariſon between your temporal and ſpiritual concerns? Awake, exert yourſelves, fly for your lives, improve while they now continue your ſacred advantages; awake, exert yourſelves, for death may be now at your doors.

What dreadfully aggravates the folly, the ſhame, the wickedneſs, the madneſs of this indolent humour is, that it frequently ſprings from intemperance. Jaded and overloaded with the draughts of luxury, the thoughtleſs, liſtleſs, ſtupified creature is utterly incapable

incapable of ſerious engagements, and eſpecially of religious ſervices. Is not this an infamy to a being who poſſeſſes reaſon? Is it leſs than horror to reflect, that it is true of a being, who profeſſes an adherence to the goſpel? Is he not accountable for the ſtupidity which he has brought upon himſelf; for the loſs of reaſon which is owing to his own intemperance; and for that ſhocking diſgrace which ariſes from the wickedneſs of his heart?

Multitudes are likewiſe detained from the ſolemnities of worſhip by the engagements of ſinful pleaſure. Spite of the prohibition and tremendous threatening of God by the Prophet, they ſeek and purſue, and are utterly immerſed in their own pleaſures upon his ſacred day. They have no pleaſure in religious ſervices; they deſpiſe the ſatisfactions of a good conſcience; they refuſe the joys ariſing from divine favour; they reject the ineffable and eternal tranſports of the heavenly ſtate—and all for what?—for the groſs entertainment of a pampered appetite, for the low converſation of company as bad

as

as themſelves, and for joys, which, upon the whole, are as much a ſcandal to reaſon as they are to religion. Theſe are the pleaſures which detain them from divine worſhip; nay, theſe are the pleaſures in which ſometimes they have the conſcience to indulge themſelves after they have been preſent at divine worſhip.

Laſtly; Mankind are withheld from the offices of God's houſe, by a growing contempt of religion, and all its ſervices. This too frequently lies at the bottom of the other temptations to profaneneſs and irreligion. They imagine, or at leaſt are inclined to imagine, that the ſabbath is not only a wearineſs, but an abſolute ſuperſtition. They think religion to be a needleſs rigour; they eſteem it's duties to be burdenſome and uſeleſs; or, if they are not in their judgment againſt its obſervances, they are totally againſt them in their hearts. They are diſpoſed to ridicule piety rather than to reverence it; they think virtue an unreaſonable reſtraint; they look upon religious ſolemnities as a dull entertainment, and have no reliſh for what

what is ſerious and good. If they do not ſay or imagine there is no God, they would be fully as well pleaſed were there really none: For 'tis unqueſtionably manifeſt that they diſlike his commands; they are out of their element when engaged in his ſervice; they think his ſway rather a tyranny than a government, and are ready to ſay, "Who "is God, that we ſhould obey his voice; or "Chriſt, that he ſhould reign over us?" It is as uſeleſs to argue in oppoſition to ſuch a temper as this, as to engage in a diſpute with a madman confined in a hoſpital.

But fain would I ſtill hope that the neglecters of religion and public worſhip have ſome remnants of reaſon left. Fain would I ſtill hope, that they are not totally inſenſible to their ſpiritual concerns, nor incurably hardened againſt the welfare of their ſouls.

Let me earneſtly intreat them therefore to examine their own hearts, and conſider with all poſſible ſerioufneſs, whether their pretences of indiſpoſition, of unavoidable buſineſs, and of other lawful reſtraints, are juſt

or not; and whether they are not really influenced by the temptations above ſpecified: Whether they abſent not themſelves from public worſhip thro' ſelf-ſufficiency: Whether they are not detained by a ſhameful indolence, by ſinful pleaſure, or by a real indifference to all ſpiritual concerns.

We frequently deceive ourſelves, we often impoſe by plauſible pretences upon our own judgment; and in nothing more than we do in our religious affairs. Would God I could find out an effectual method to make an impreſſion upon your hearts! Would God I could awaken you either by hope or fear; ſo that every exhortation might not be loſt upon you, that every motive might not be fruſtrated, but that ſome inducement or other in the Chriſtian ſcheme might influence your hearts and lives! Only conſider; what will be your thoughts in a ſeaſon of affliction? What will be your wiſhes in a dying hour? What will be your ſtate when appearing at our Lord's tribunal? Would God you had a lively apprehenſion of what are the feelings, the diſtreſſes, the tortures of

of ſinners, when lying on the borders of eternity, pained with the recollection of neglecting their duty, and diſtracted with conſcious guilt! Did you never ſtand by the beds of ſuch dying offenders? Did you never attend their deſpairing confeſſions? Did you ever hear their groans—groans that are occaſioned more by the agonies of conſcience than by the pangs of diſſolving nature? If not, it is pity you are ſtrangers to ſo dreadful, though improving, a ſcene. Alas! I have ſeen it in more inſtances than one. I have ſeen the looks of outrageous deſpair,—I have heard the groans of irreparable guilt, ariſing, in part, by their own confeſſions, from the inſupportable conſciouſneſs of neglecting public ſolemnities, and eſpecially the Lord's Supper. I have been a witneſs to agonies, which no comfort could aſſuage; and to torments of mind, which, I am firmly perſuaded, nothing could exceed but hell.

Sinners! Neglecters of public worſhip! Ye ſelf-deceivers! Fly to the throne of grace. I intreat you, in the name of that

bleſſed Redeemer who himſelf ſuffered unutterable anguiſh for your ſakes, fly to the throne of grace. Repent of the paſt, attend for the future at the gates of wiſdom, retrieve your neglects by doubling your diligence, and endeavour to worſhip with that ſerioufneſs and improvement, as though each day were your laſt. To attach yourſelves more firmly to the aſſemblies of worſhip, remember the awfulneſs of that tremendous aſſembly, in which you muſt finally appear. It is impoſſible to determine how ſoon. It is hidden in the boſom of infinite wiſdom, and perhaps may happen at your next trifling hour, when you are profaning the ſabbath, and forgetful of God and your own ſouls.

SERMON

# SERMON II.

## ON CHRIST's LOOK DIRECTED TO PETER.

*LUKE* xxii. 61, 62.

AND THE LORD TURNED, AND LOOKED UPON PETER; AND PETER REMEMBERED THE WORD OF THE LORD, HOW HE HAD SAID UNTO HIM, "BEFORE THE COCK "CROW, THOU SHALT DENY ME THRICE." AND PETER WENT OUT, AND WEPT BITTERLY.

THE pathetic emphaſis of this paſſage I have often remarked occaſionally, while engaged upon other ſubjects; but I think it is of ſuch importance, that it well deſerves to be ſeparately and largely conſidered. This expreſſive look of the Saviour, directed to Peter, as it was highly uſeful to him who beheld it, may alſo be very beneficial to us who know it only by relation: For indeed otherwiſe it were unaccountable to find it recorded in the ſacred hiſtory.

The method which I ſhall purſue in treating this ſubject will be, to repreſent from our Lord's character, and the circumſtances

of the caſe, the manner of this look, or the indications that now appeared in the Saviour's aſpect; and then to conſider the effects which it had on the revolted apoſtle.

With regard to the expreſſions which appeared in the countenance of the Saviour, I begin with obſerving, that he beheld the apoſtle without the leaſt ſurpriſe, as finding no more in his ſhameful fall, than what he had foreſeen and predicted.

It muſt be owned there was ſomething in this prediction very aſtoniſhing, and which yielded a full teſtimony to the divine miſſion of Jeſus. If he had only foretold the event in general, notwithſtanding the ſeeming improbability of it, from the ſanguine temper of Peter, and his boaſted fortitude, it had not been ſo remarkable, nor had he thus given a ſatisfactory proof of inſpiration; for by natural ſagacity he might have been thought to dive ſo deep into the human heart, as to ſee the apoſtle's inability to ſtand ſo ſevere a trial. But the hiſtory informs us of one particular in this propheſy, which no human wiſdom could

could poſſibly have aſcertained, and which in the event was moſt exactly accompliſhed; nay, accompliſhed in ſuch a manner, that a moment's difference would have eſſentially altered the caſe, and totally diſgraced the prediction. "Before the cock crow, thou "ſhalt deny me thrice." Peter denied him the third time, and immediately the cock crew.

Nay, here is another circumſtance equally aſtoniſhing, even the exact number of times the apoſtle ſhould be tempted to deny him: —a circumſtance preciſely verified; which no human ſkill could have foreſeen, and which our Saviour, without ſupernatural knowledge, or divine communication, could never have foretold. But in this, among other inſtances, our Lord's own declaration was thoroughly juſtified:—"He whom God hath "ſent, ſpeaketh the words of God; for God "giveth not the Spirit by meaſure unto him."

From hence we may infer, that our Lord looked upon Peter with great calmneſs; and that whatever elſe his countenance might expreſs, it diſcovered nothing of that

diſturbed emotion, which ariſes from ſuddenneſs and ſurpriſe.

*Secondly*; We may aſſure ourſelves from our Lord's character, and from the nature of the caſe, that he looked on the fallen apoſtle with diſapprobation. It was impoſſible that he, who was himſelf holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparate from ſinners; and who, even that inſtant, was giving ſuch an example of integrity triumphing over temptation, ſhould not be diſpleaſed with ſuch a behaviour of ſo near a friend. Nor is it yet to be imagined, that a perſon of our Lord's ſenſibility, who, whenever he taught by word or look, always taught with authority, ſhould not, upon ſo extraordinary an occaſion, expreſs his diſpleaſure in his countenance. And whether it was eaſy to bear the rebuke of that aſpect, which always reproved with juſtice, but never with malevolence, I appeal to the heart of every Chriſtian, who will but place himſelf in the ſituation of the apoſtle here deſcribed. He had not only denied his Maſter and Redeemer, but redoubled his denial of him

again

again and again. Nay, he had denied him in ſpite of recent and moſt violent profeſſions of adherence: "Though I die with thee, "yet will I not deny thee!" What is yet more, he had denied him in his own preſence and hearing, with bitter oaths and execrations. Moſt gallant apoſtle! Moſt admirable fortitude! Excellently well fitted for the calm of proſperity, but in the ſtorm of adverſity totally ſunk and loſt! This was a very different man from him, who boaſted ſo loudly, and who ought to have been better armed by the warning given him beforehand. But, bleſſed be God, it was alſo a different and better man, who ran afterwards every hazard for his crucified Lord, and underwent for his ſake an ignominious and cruel death. It was a different, and a better man, who bravely underwent the fate foretold by his maſter: "When thou waſt "young, thou girdedſt thyſelf, and walkedſt "whither thou wouldeſt; but when thou "ſhalt be old, thou ſhalt ſtretch forth thy "hands, and another ſhall gird thee, and "carry thee whither thou wouldeſt not.

"This ſpake he, ſignifying by what death "he ſhould glorify God."

In the mean while we may be well aſſured, that when our bleſſed Saviour obſerved Peter ſo groſsly, and heinouſly deſerting him, he beheld him with diſapprobation.

*Thirdly*; We may be certain he expreſſed in this look a mixture of tenderneſs and compaſſion. Our Lord was animated by the ardors of benevolence beyond all the children of men. Can you poſſibly doubt it when you think of his kind actions, of his exquiſite ſufferings, and his condeſcenſion for our ſakes, to a ſtate ſo low and afflicted. Had he thought the apoſtle would never have recovered himſelf, his concern would have been, I will not ſay greater, but full as great, as even his countenance could have expreſt. But he, who foreſaw his defection, could eaſily foreſee his recovery: And yet we may certainly conclude, that he heartily ſympathized with him in that anxiety with which he knew he would be tortured. Well did he know that ſo heinous a crime could

could be followed by no eaſy repentance, but that the pain of the offender muſt bear a proportion to his guilt. He could not be indifferent therefore to the ſituation of his diſciple and friend, but felt for him in all his agonies. Nay, he felt for him in his agonies, though himſelf was placed in ſuch melancholy circumſtances; notwithſtanding the anguiſh he had lately undergone, and the excruciating death which lay full in his view. Even in this ſituation he ſympathized with the offender before him. No dangers or ſufferings of his own could render him unmindful of his friends; nor could his feeling for their miſeries be ſo faint and languid, as not to be expreſt in his countenance. He certainly is the true and eminent friend, who is not only concerned for us when we are in trouble, but retains his commiſeration for us when he is exquiſitely troubled himſelf.

We are now to conſider the effects of this expreſſive look on the revolted apoſtle himſelf. And, *firſt*, it confirmed his faith in the divine miſſion of the Saviour. It made him

him remember the words of the Lord Jeſus; or reminded him of a propheſy which to his coſt was now fulfilled, and muſt give him a very feeling proof, that the pretenſions of Chriſt were eſtabliſhed beyond all contradiction. You may think perhaps that the apoſtle had no occaſion to be thus convinced. He had ſeen ſuch a number and variety of miracles wrought by his maſter, that you may imagine he did not need to be farther ſatisfied, that his claims were well-grounded. But with all the prejudices of his country in his head concerning the temporal dominion of the Meſſiah, of which he could have little expectation from a man about to be crucified, he might have ſome doubts, notwithſtanding the miracles he had ſeen. When however his faith was ſtrengthened by this new exhibition of our Lord's ſupernatural power, and that in an inſtance which ſo nearly affected himſelf, it triumphed over all oppoſition, and was followed by ſuitable effects.

*Secondly*; This look of the Saviour excited in him ſuch remorſe as no language can

can expreſs. Such a glance, from a perſon of ſo great authority, of ſuch inflexible virtue and goodneſs, and ſo beloved and eſteemed, was abſolutely intolerable. The conſciouſneſs of his own crime, aided by ſuch a regard from his maſter's eye; by an attention ſo calm, ſo majeſtic, ſo diſapproving, and yet ſo tender; muſt certainly ſink him to the loweſt depth of anguiſh. No words, though of angels, I was about to ſay, no language of the Redeemer himſelf, could be ſo emphatical and cutting. Let us now therefore imagine, and we can imagine but very imperfectly, the ſelf-accuſations of this fallen apoſtle, had he time given him to reflect. "O this treachery of a heart, that "promiſed the moſt undaunted fortitude! "Were theſe the expectations I gave him "when he was in his agony? Is this "the return I make him for his inſtruc-"tions, for all his deeds of tenderneſs and "friendſhip, and for the tortures he is about "to undergo for my ſake? Had it not been "for me and for other ſinners, he would have "had no occaſion to condeſcend to this ſuf-"fering ſtate; and had not he been a ſufferer,

I ſhould

" I ſhould not thus have deſerted him. And " then this language, this execrable lan- " guage, derived from infernal ſpirits, which " now dropped from my lips! Did I learn " it from him? Is this the fruit of my in- " timate converſe with the bleſſed ſon of " God? Thou greateſt of beings, and thou " alſo, my injured Redeemer, condeſcend to " ſupport me. O the crowing of that cock! " Dreadful memorial! O the keenneſs of " that glance! It ſtruck, it penetrated me " quite through my heart. The dignity of " that aſpect, the force of that ſilent and " home reproof, are not to be borne. Had " he viewed me with more ſeverity, I could " have endured it with greater reſolution. " What would I not give, could I fly from " myſelf for ever!"

*Thirdly*; Our Lord's look, directed to Peter, being ſtrongly expreſſive of the greateſt tenderneſs, heightened his ſorrow, and yet encouraged his penitence. This benevolence of reproof, though it diſtreſſed him with more ingenuous ſhame and regret, yet reminded him of the gracious declaration,

with

with which the very prediction of his fall was prefaced in the chapter before us. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath deſired "to have you, that he may ſift you as wheat; "but I have prayed for thee that thy faith "fail not;"—that is, that it may not finally fail. Surely the Redeemer, who preſented for him ſuch a petition, and had ſuch conſideration of his weakneſs, though he diſapproved of his conduct, could never regard him with implacable anger. His look reminded him of this kind declaration, and carried alſo in itſelf the ſtrongeſt conviction of tenderneſs.

But imagine not, in the mean while, that the apoſtle was thus at a cheap rate convinced of his Maſter's compaſſion. If you have ever injured a perſon you reverenced and affectionately eſteemed; and, inſtead of reproaches, have met with nothing but commiſeration in return; you may then, and not otherwiſe, form ſome conception of what the apoſtle felt. Or, to aſcend higher, if the goodneſs of God and Chriſt have ever afflicted you at the remembrance of your

ſins,

ſins, which I truſt you have often experienced, you will then, inſtead of reproaching this timid apoſtle, think of him with the tendereſt pity.

But now, what could be a higher encouragement to ſincere penitence, than the recollection of that mercy, which heals the wounds itſelf hath made, and compenſates pain with a ſucceſſion of the livelieſt pleaſure?

As the reſult of all, this calm, reproving, compaſſionate look of the Redeemer drew from his eyes a copious flood of tears. It reached and opened his heart, and had, as is natural in ſo extraordinary a caſe, a correſpondent effect upon his eyes. He thus gave vent to the ſwelling affections of his ſoul, and, as his ſorrow was attended with real penitence, this plentiful diſcharge of it muſt give him ſome degree of eaſe. "He wept "bitterly." His tears were attended with uncommon regret and anguiſh. "He went "out, and wept bitterly." Though ſome portion of his timidity might yet remain, and he might be ſtill afraid of diſcovering himſelf

himſelf by his lamentations; yet, as we know he was ſincere upon the whole, we may be certain he affected ſecreſy partly upon that account.

It is an obſervation of the poet, and an obſervation founded on the moſt accurate judgment, that "he who mourns without "witneſſes, muſt certainly mourn with ſin-"cerity."* And thus it was with the apoſtle Peter; he "went out, and wept bitterly."

And now, by way of improvement; this memorable piece of hiſtory may alſo be a confirmation of our faith, as well as of the apoſtle's, when he had thus ſhamefully fallen. We ſhall find upon reflection, that the foreknowledge of Jeſus, atteſted by ſuch particular, contingent, and ſtriking circumſtances, proved his miſſion, as the Saviour of mankind, beyond all reaſonable contradiction. Let it produce in our minds that happy effect, and be attended with every ſuitable conſequence with regard both to our temper and conduct.

* Ille dolet verè, qui ſine teſte dolet.

Whenever

Whenever we have ſinned, and eſpecially when we are tempted, and in danger of ſinning, let us imagine we receive ſuch a look from the Saviour; and in every inſtance in which we are actually guilty, let us imitate St. Peter's penitence. Whatever be our temptations, and however ſecretly we may imagine we offend, it is all known to our Saviour. Could we once contrive by any method to render our ſenſe of our Lord's preſence and inſpection more lively and powerful, we ſhould be more upon our guard againſt every iniquity, and more affected with the conſciouſneſs of guilt, whenever we had unhappily offended.

Indeed the eternal Father is at all times and in all places preſent with us, inſpects our conduct, and is perfectly acquainted with our hearts. Conſidered in itſelf, and duly attended to, nothing can be more awful and tremendous than his authority. But alas! he, on account of his inviſible nature, is ſeldom remembered and regarded, and makes but too little impreſſion upon theſe inſenſible hearts. The thought of being inſpected by

by our bleſſed Redeemer, who has been pleaſed to aſſume our nature, and appear in our form, may perhaps more powerfully affect our minds.

May it now be granted by the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that we live ſuch obedient and devoted lives, as to receive from him in the laſt day a look of approbation, that ſhall fill our hearts with unſpeakable joy, and be the commencement of eternal tranſports.

# SERMON III.

## ON THE NATURE, REWARD, AND HONOUR OF CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE.

*JOHN* xii. 20.

IF ANY MAN SERVE ME, LET HIM FOLLOW ME; AND WHERE I AM, THERE SHALL ALSO MY SERVANT BE: IF ANY MAN SERVE ME, HIM WILL MY FATHER HONOUR.

AMIDST the various and undeſerved treatment which religion has met with, it is moſt ſurpriſing, as it is really in it's own nature ſo excellent, and confers ſuch a dignity on the human mind, that it ſhould ever meet with contempt. It is no wonder that the world ſhould neglect religion, or refuſe to perform it's duties, becauſe they have not the reſolution to reject thoſe baits of ſinful pleaſure, thoſe bribes of profit, or thoſe glittering pomps of honour, by which they are perpetually ſeduced. It is as little remarkable that ſome of them ſhould view it with hatred; as it lays a reſtraint upon thoſe irregular appetites, in the gratification of which they have placed their ſupreme

felicity. But that ever a rational creature ſhould deſpiſe, or pretend to deſpiſe it, is matter of juſt aſtoniſhment.

I am very ſenſible that the worſt of men muſt reverence true goodneſs, when they conſider it in their cooler hours; but they too often both expreſs and entertain a contempt of it, and force themſelves to deſpiſe what otherwiſe their conſciences would approve. They look upon the ſerious profeſſors of piety as a weak ſort of people, who want the ſenſe and ſpirit to be wicked, live in a ſtate of perpetual ſlavery, and deſerve to be treated with univerſal ſcorn and deriſion.

In the mean while, how different is the notion given us of religion in the text! It is there repreſented as an imitation of the Son of God; as tending to prepare us for his ſociety and friendſhip; and as gaining us not only approbation, but dignities and honours from the greateſt and beſt of beings. Take it in his words, who is ſo well qualified to make an eſtimation of characters, that he

he is appointed to judge the world. "If "any man ſerve"—or pretend to ſerve— "me, let him follow me; and where I am, "there ſhall alſo my ſervant be: If any man "ſerve me, him will my Father honour."

The ſenſe of this text naturally divides itſelf into the following propoſitions: That whoſoever would approve himſelf a faithful and acceptable ſervant of our bleſſed Lord, muſt follow his example, by giving up every thing that is inconſiſtent with his duty; that the faithful ſervant, or perſevering follower of Chriſt, ſhall aſſociate hereafter with his maſter in a ſtate of happineſs; and that the reward of our Lord's faithful ſervants ſhall be not only happineſs but honour.

*Firſt*; That whoever would approve himſelf the faithful and acceptable ſervant of our bleſſed Lord, muſt follow his example, by giving up every thing which is inconſiſtent with his duty. That all this is compriſed within the limits of our Lord's example is manifeſt, not only from the nature of the thing, but likewiſe from his

own words in the verſes preceding the text. "And Jeſus anſwered them,"—(that is, Andrew and Philip, who were deſirous of ſhewing him to the curious Greeks;)—"ſaying, the hour is come that the Son of "Man ſhould be glorified;"—meaning, by his death and reſurrection.—"Verily, ve-"rily, I ſay unto you, except a corn of "wheat fall into the ground, and die, it "abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth "forth much fruit."—A ſufficient intimation, that his death was neceſſary to the increaſe of his diſciples, and to the promotion of their ſpiritual good. And here we may obſerve in paſſing, that Saint Paul took the hint from theſe words of Chriſt, when, in that noted chapter of his firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians, he compared the death and reſurrection of the body, to the corruption and revival of a grain of ſeed. But our Lord proceeds:—"He that loveth his life" —better than my cauſe—"ſhall loſe it; and "he that hateth his life in this world,"—or chooſes to part with it rather than abandon my cauſe,—"ſhall keep it unto life "eternal. If any man ſerve me let him

"follow

"follow me, &c." That is, as the connection now manifeſtly ſhews, let him be cheerfully ready, as I am, whenever he ſhall be called in the courſe of providence, to yield up his life in order to maintain his integrity. If he be not ſincere in this reſolution, depending upon divine aids, he cannot be accounted a follower of my example, nor, of conſequence, my faithful ſervant.

This then is the doctrine, however remarkable it may ſeem, which our Lord teaches in the text. But as through the favour of an indulgent providence, we are never called to ſuffer death for the ſake of Chriſtianity and a good conſcience, it will be uſeful to obſerve, that if life itſelf ought to be parted with, rather than our fidelity to our exalted Maſter, much more ſhould we for his ſake abandon our corrupt luſts and paſſions, which is an eaſier inſtance of ſelf-denial, and ſuch as we have occaſion to put in practice every day of our lives. If the primitive Chriſtians were required, as indeed ſome Chriſtians are at preſent in foreign countries, for the ſake of the goſpel

to overcome the principle of ſelf-preſervation, and the natural horror of a violent death; ſurely we are wretched pretenders to Chriſtianity if we refuſe not, for the ſame cauſe, every inſtance of pleaſure, profit, or honour, which is forbidden by the laws of God. Our Lord's declaration is expreſs, and not to be evaded by any ſubtilty or deceitfulneſs of ſin: To ſerve him is to follow his example; that is, to follow it in every thing which our different ſtations and circumſtances require. We muſt cultivate every temper, form every habit, and diſcharge every duty, in our own hearts and lives, according to our various conditions, of which he hath ſet us the moſt amiable and attractive pattern. He was meek and humble in the moſt aſtoniſhing degree; cordially deſpiſed the pomps and vanities of life, and when the glory of God and the welfare of man required it, he quitted his celeſtial honours for the loweſt of earthly poverty. Though "he was rich, yet for our ſakes he "became poor, that we through his poverty "might be made rich." We ſhould always remember therefore, that ſo far as is required

quired by reaſon and religion, " the ſame " mind ſhould be in us which was in Chriſt " Jeſus;" whom we ought to imitate, though we can never equal. But to ſpecify every particular of his divine temper and illuſtrious life, would be no leſs than deſcribing every inſtance of piety and virtue which can poſſibly prevail in a character. It would be diſplaying " whatſoever things are true, " whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever " things are venerable, whatſoever things " are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, " and whatſoever things are of good re- " port." His ſelf government, his patience, his cheerful ſubmiſſion to the divine will, his ardent zeal for the divine glory, his love to mankind, which was ſtronger than death, his unwearied activity in promoting their welfare, and his invincible fortitude, in ſpite of a peculiarly tender heart; theſe and his other excellencies preſent his character to our view, as the transfiguration did his face to the diſciples, ſhining with a ſplendour like that of the ſun in the firmament.

Our

Our light is alſo required, in our lower ſphere, " to ſhine before men, to the glory " of our heavenly Father." We are commanded to perform, in imitation of his example, with inflexible fidelity the moſt difficult and ſelf-denying duties: And indeed there is no difficulty which will not leſſen by time and habit, or which can ever be ſuperior to the aids of divine power. " He (ſays our Lord) that taketh not his " croſs and followeth after me, is not worthy " of me." In a like ſtrain Saint Peter; who exhorts us to imitate, in a ſpiritual manner, the Redeemer's death: " Foraſ- " much then as Chriſt hath ſuffered for us " in the fleſh, arm yourſelves likewiſe with " the ſame mind: For he that hath ſuffered " in the fleſh hath ceaſed from ſin, that he " no longer ſhould live the reſt of his time " in the fleſh, to the luſts of men, but to " the will of God."

But it is neceſſary, in this place, to point out the peculiar advantages of our Lord's example, which is eminently uſeful in point of

of direction, by way of encouragement, and conſidered as a ſtrong obligation.

In point of direction our Lord's example ſpeaks a language, if poſſible, more clear and explicit than that of any commands. "You "are deſirous" may we ſuppoſe our Lord to ſay, "you are deſirous of approving your- "ſelves my ſervants, gaining my favour, "and the acceptance of him who ſent me. "You are eager to learn in what manner "this end may be accompliſhed, and would "not be deceived in a matter of ſo great "importance. Attend therefore, and I will "give you a rule which ſhall be equally "ſhort and plain: If any man ſerve me, let "him follow me. Let him ſtudy my con- "duct, which is the beſt comment on my "precepts; let him act in like circum- "ſtances, and according to his ſtation, as I "act; let him cheriſh the ſame ſpirit which "I diſcover, and then he is my faithful "ſervant. If he be ever at a loſs, in any "particular emergency, with regard to his "duty, he may find ſome inſtance or other "in my conduct, which will ſolve his

"difficulties,

" difficulties, and point out a path for his " feet."

The pattern which our Lord hath ſet us will be equally uſeful by way of encouragement and ſupport. Numerous are the obſtructions which Chriſtians meet with in this probationary ſtate, which greatly retard them in the practice of goodneſs, and in their ſerious hours lie heavy on their hearts. The allurements of pleaſure, the diſcouragements of affliction, the irregular movements of appetite and paſſion, the prevalence of inattention and forgetfulneſs, the ſtrong current of popular practice, and the unhappy influence of ſinful ſhame; how ſhall we overcome them all? But we have no reaſon to deſpair. The Saviour's example may inſpire us with invincible fortitude. He has conquered ſin in our nature, and in our nature he has practiſed univerſal righteouſneſs. What though he was more than man? Yet, as man, he had his difficulties as well as we. He was not exempted from our innocent feelings; he was capable of hunger, wearineſs, and pain; he was not a ſtranger

to

to the agonies of ſorrow, and ſeems to have been formed with a ſenſibility of ſpirit beyond what is common to humanity. Let his behaviour at the grave of Lazarus, let his tears over Jeruſalem, let the awful ſcene in the garden of Gethſemane, ſpeak for his tenderneſs of heart. But yet he demonſtrated that univerſal holineſs might be practiſed by man; he was attended with ſupports of which we, unleſs wanting to ourſelves, ſhall never be deſtitute; and exhibited to our view ſuch a height of perfection, as, though we can never thoroughly reach, we ſhould approach as nearly as we can. Imperfect, it is acknowledged, we ſhall be at beſt in this frail and mortal ſtate; but if we content ourſelves with reſembling an imperfect pattern, we ſhall be more imperfect ſtill. We are always apt to come ſhort of our ſtandard; and therefore to ſet before us a character which riſes to the greateſt poſſible height of excellence, is eminently uſeful, that we ourſelves, by perpetual exerciſe, may grow as near it as we can. Let us make it our habitual practice therefore to look unto Jeſus, the author

and

and finiſher of our faith; this conduct being equally our duty and our privilege.

The example of the Saviour has not only the luſtre of direction and the comfort of encouragement, but the force of the ſtrongeſt obligation. If he, who was the brightneſs of the Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon, condeſcended to a ſtate where he was obliged to practice the humbleſt and moſt painful duties; who or what are we, that we ſhould have the inſolence to think ourſelves exempted? If he ſuffered ſuch inconveniences, ſuch reproaches, and ſuch agonies, and died ſuch a cruel and ignominious death, can we have the vanity and preſumption to think ourſelves privileged from trials, or judge it hard that our happineſs ſhould ever be interrupted;—we, who are not only ſo unworthy and mean, but ſuch ſinful and ill-deſerving creatures?

But further; the incitement of gratitude, ariſing from our Lord's example, is a conſideration more powerful than all the reſt. For whoſe ſake did he quit ſuch glories, undergo

dergo ſuch inconveniences, ſuch reproaches, ſuch pains and agonies, and ſo dreadfully ſevere a death? For our's, we are well aſſured. Was all this ſcene of humiliations and ſorrows intended to deliver us from a trifling evil, or diſpenſe to us an inconſiderable good? Infinitely far from it. That had been unworthy of the divine wiſdom, by which the redemption was contrived. Sin and it's conſequences were incomparably the moſt dreadful of evils; and from theſe the Saviour delivered us. Integrity, the divine favour, and the joys of heaven make up a happineſs, compared with which every thing beſides is vanity; and this is the happineſs which the Saviour was ſent to procure us. Can we ever therefore imagine that any duty is too painful to perform, that any temptation is too violent to reſiſt, or any ſuffering too ſevere to undergo, for the ſake of the Redeemer, and the Father who ſent him to redeem us? Benevolent Father! Condeſcending Redeemer! We can never be ſufficiently thankful for this divine example, which is formed with a ſovereign virtue to deſtroy ſin, and inflame us with the love of goodneſs.

*Secondly*;

*Secondly*; We learn from the text, that the faithful ſervants or perſevering followers of our Lord, ſhall aſſociate hereafter with their Maſter in a ſtate of happineſs. "And "where I am, there ſhall alſo my ſervant be." That no others ſhall be admitted to his preſence and intimate friendſhip, not only this text particularly ſuggeſts, but reaſon and ſcripture in general ſo loudly declare, that it cannot be queſtioned. But how great is the privilege for even his faithful ſervants to aſſociate with their exalted Lord, and to be happy in his preſence for ever! He does not treat them with contempt and rigour, and exclude them from his ſight, becauſe they are his ſervants. He allows them, by his Father's commiſſion, the joint participation of one inheritance with himſelf; he calls them his friends and brethren. In his preſence they can be no other than happy. In his kingdom, under his eye, in the enjoyment of his converſe, they can ſuffer no miſery, nor want any ſatisfaction. When his diſciples converſed with him upon earth, they were yet ſubject to ſevere afflictions, from which even he himſelf was not at that

ſeaſon

ſeaſon free. But in heaven it will be far otherwiſe. There the redemption will be compleat. There they ſhall be entirely his ſervants, and therefore wholly exempt from the ſlavery and puniſhment of ſin. There ſhall their felicity be perfect, with regard both to their bodies and ſouls. They ſhall ſuffer no evil, they ſhall fear no danger, they ſhall not experience or apprehend a loſs, neither ſhall they be deſtitute of any enjoyment. With better faculties, with more extenſive knowledge, and with livelier affections, they ſhall celebrate redeeming mercy; nor will it be the ſmalleſt ingredient of their felicity to behold, in a ſtate of exalted honour, him who ſuffered ſo much for their good. This, among other particulars, was the ſubject of that ſolemn and pathetic act of devotion, which was performed by our compaſſionate High Prieſt, a little before his ſacrifice. "Father, I will that they alſo "whom thou haſt given me, be with me "where I am; that they may behold my "glory which thou haſt given me: For thou "lovedſt me before the foundation of the "world."

But the text aſſures us, *thirdly*, that the reward of our Lord's faithful followers ſhall be not only happineſs, but glory and honour. This indeed is implied in the former part of the ſubject, their aſſociating in the heavenly ſtate with their bleſſed Maſter himſelf. But in the latter clauſe of the text it is expreſsly declared: "If any man ſerve me, him will "my Father honour." How aſtoniſhing a condeſcenſion in the greateſt of Beings, and how exalted a privilege to his frail and unworthy creatures! Have we ever conſidered the glories of the eternal Majeſty? If we have, we muſt be amazed at the thought that he ſhould approve and honour ſuch a being as his creature man, and place him in a ſtate of glory. If man, after having exerciſed unfeigned penitence, practical faith, and perſevering obedience, were placed only in a ſtate of contentment, it would ſurely be an illuſtrious proof of divine grace. But to fix him in a ſtate of honour, to inveſt him with dignity, and ſurround him with glory, to aſſociate him not only with angels, but with the bleſſed Redeemer, to place him high within the verge of his own court, and

to

to beam upon him the ſplendors of his own throne;—this is worthy the munificence of a God, who parted with his Son for the ſake of our eternal ſalvation. It is ſaid even of our bodies, that though they are "ſown in "diſhonour, they ſhall be raiſed in glory." As ſome imagine, and with great reaſon from the frequent intimations of ſcripture, they ſhall not only be ſtrong, agile, unpained, immortal, and adorned with the moſt amiable beauty; but encompaſſed with a radiance, like that which is ſuppoſed to have inveſted our firſt parents, when they were "naked, but not aſhamed." And, as to our ſouls, who can imagine to what glories they ſhall be raiſed, what a ſtate of dignity they ſhall poſſeſs in heaven, that myſterious world which we ſhall never underſtand, 'till we experience it's happineſs and glory. We cannot with any certainty be particular in deſcribing it; for it is affirmed in the ſacred oracles, that "it doth not yet appear what "we ſhall be." We muſt therefore ſuſpend our impatient curioſity to the laſt and deciſive day.

In the mean while we can't help obſerving, how wondrouſly munificent God ſhews himſelf in rewarding his imperfect creatures. He rewards not with a ſparing but a liberal hand, and in a manner altogether becoming his inexhauſtible power and goodneſs.

But now, how great the folly of ſinners in refuſing to be followers of Chriſt! Is there any diſgrace in being his ſervants? Is there any loſs in denying yourſelves, in denying the worſt and moſt contemptible part of yourſelves, your appetites and paſſions, for his ſake? Conſider the recompence which the goſpel hath ſet before you. It is not only happineſs, but glory. It is not only contentment, but a ſtate of dignity, which no language can expreſs, and no heart conceive. What is it that prevents you from complying with the Saviour's demands? Do you diſbelieve the reality of thoſe glorious things which are promiſed you? They are attended with the ſtrongeſt and moſt invincible evidence, not only from revelation, but from the dictates of reaſon itſelf; for that God governs the world, and will reward the faithful

faithful among his intelligent creatures, is the loud, the clear, and unceaſing proclamation of nature. If the goſpel hath made clearer diſcoveries, more ſtrongly aſſured you of divine grace, and given you to expect more exalted degrees of glory; let not that be a prejudice againſt the ſacred revelation, but rather, for that reaſon, eſteem and admire it the more. Be not diſpleaſed with your Maker, and with thoſe who are deſirous of his honour and your good, for endeavouring to excite you to prepare for that glorious ſtate. Hereafter perhaps you may think very differently of theſe momentous ſubjects. Perhaps, before you have quitted life, and made the aweful experiment of another world, you may think thoſe who reminded you of eternity your beſt friends; and thoſe licentious companions your cruelleſt enemies, and thoſe contemptible trifles your dreadfulleſt curſe, which effaced from your hearts the impreſſion of all ſerious advice. The eternal God is my witneſs, my heart bleeds at the fearful apprehenſion, leſt you ſhould lie deſpairing and tortured upon a bed of ſickneſs as I have

ſeen others lie. What words can expreſs the madneſs of a ſinner in a ſtate of ſecurity, and his tortures in a ſtate of deſpair? Who can preſume, without cancelling the goſpel, impoſing upon a hapleſs and endangered ſoul, and giving the lie to the unſullied purity of heaven, to afford him any certain comfort at that gloomy hour, when there is no diſtinguiſhing between ſincerity and fear; and when the ſinner, for ought that appears, may be more concerned for his danger than for his guilt? Remember this, all ye who are impenitent. Remember, that as happineſs and glory are prepared for the righteous; anguiſh and ſhame are likewiſe reſerved for the wicked. Remember it, let it ſink deep into your hearts, and may God follow the happy impreſſion with the influences of his grace!

*Finally*; What reaſon have true Chriſtians for thankfulneſs and joy, and with what pleaſure and improvement ſhould they attend thoſe inſtitutions, in which communion is peculiarly maintained with God and the Redeemer! What follower of Chriſt would keep

keep at a diſtance from ſuch a ſervice, who would attend it with a trifling and indifferent ſpirit, or perform it without improvement? Chriſtians! we are now following the Redeemer with painful ſteps. We catch a glimpſe of him through the medium of his ſacred appointments; but hereafter we ſhall certainly behold him nearer, and dwell in his preſence to eternity.

SERMON

# SERMON IV.

## ON THE MUTUAL AID OF THE VIRTUES.

*JAMES* i. 4.

THAT YE MAY BE PERFECT AND ENTIRE, WANTING NOTHING.

HOW happy for mankind, were they as moderate in their deſires, and as contented with their ſhares of temporal riches, as they are with regard to ſpiritual! But though multitudes are ſatisfied with very ſmall portions of piety and virtue, or even without a grain of either, we are required by the higheſt authority to cheriſh that nobler avarice, an eagerneſs to become richer in faith and good works, to attain and improve in every habit, and practiſe every duty of the divine life. Thus the Apoſtle, either ſenſible that patience under perſecution would produce and increaſe other graces in the converts to whom he is addreſſing himſelf, or elſe obſerving that they wanted only an improved patience to render them complete; gives them the following advice in the text and context: "My bre-

"thren,

" thren, count it all joy when ye fall into " divers temptations;"—meaning, various afflictions on account of religion; a remarkable ſentiment!—" knowing this, that the " trial of your faith worketh patience. But " let patience have her perfect work, that " ye may be perfect and entire, wanting " nothing."

It may ſeem ſtrange, that a creature ſo weak and tempted as man, ſhould be required in a moral and ſpiritual ſenſe to be perfect. Now ideal perfection, or the moſt complete and exalted moral excellence, of which we can form a notion, is, I acknowledge, beyond his reach; but for that very reaſon, I conclude, beyond alſo the extent of his duty. It will ſurely be admitted, that man is capable of attaining every thing he can attain; which is only the ſame propoſition in different words; and farther, that no one is obliged to attain more than he is capable of attaining: from whence this conſequence inevitably follows, that man is capable of relative perfection, that is, of an accompliſhment in goodneſs ſuited to his nature and ſtate.

Beſides

Beſides it muſt be conſidered, that as in the natural, ſo in the ſpiritual man, there are two kinds of perfection; one of parts, the other of degrees or growth. Infancy may poſſeſs the former, whereas the latter is uſually reſerved for maturer years. Thus the real Chriſtian hath every kind of good diſpoſition implanted in his heart, and every kind of duty according to his ſituation, diſcharged in his life; however various the degrees of proficiency in thoſe endowments acquired by different perſons.

Some perhaps may account it needleſs to advance reaſons for the commands given us in ſcripture to attain all the virtues and graces of Chriſtianity; for they will naturally ſay, "All the obligations of morality and "religion are enforced by the ſame autho-"rity, and recommend themſelves by their "native beauty and uſefulneſs; and there-"fore, if you are negligent of one, why not "negligent of all?" But if we look abroad into the world, we ſhall find it by no means an uncommon caſe for men to yield but a partial ſubmiſſion to the commands of the Deity,

Deity, and the dictates of their own conſciences. Some are ſo intent on real or ſeeming devotion, that they deſpiſe the perſonal and ſocial virtues as mere beggarly elements, and below the notice of ſuch exalted minds as hold intimate converſe with the Deity; while others, profeſſing a moſt ardent paſſion for virtue, or, at leaſt, for ſome particular virtue ſuiting their taſte and temper, have no more devotion than if no object of devotion exiſted in the univerſe.

This being the ſtate of even the leaſt corrupted part of the world with regard to integrity, it cannot be deemed altogether unneceſſary to advance, out of ſeveral which might be offered, the following argument in behalf of univerſal righteouſneſs; that each virtue and grace hath a tendency, more or leſs, to promote and eſtabliſh the reſt.

Each virtue does this, in the firſt place, by preparing the temper for other duties. Thus, according to the moſt probable meaning of Saint James in the context, patience when arrived at the conſummation of it's work,

work, or having exerted itſelf to the utmoſt, would render theſe converts perfect, ſo that, in a ſpiritual ſenſe, they ſhould want nothing.

The beſt definition of patience ſeems to be, ſuch a calm endurance of ſuffering, as is not accompanied with unavailing reſiſtance, grief, or anger. Now it is eaſy to perceive that this excellent habit, where it conſiderably prevails, is calculated to maintain and ſupport both piety and benevolence; benevolence, by reſtraining the outrage of the rougher paſſions; and piety, by keeping us in a tranquil frame for devotion, and diſpoſing us to conſider coolly, that the ſupreme hand which afflicts us is that of a Parent infinitely wiſe and good. But benevolence and piety are neither backward nor ſparing in the payment of this debt to patience. A real and ardent good-will towards our fellow creatures, hath a wonderful tendency to ſweeten our tempers in other reſpects, to check our unreaſonable and raſh reſentment, and to reconcile us eſpecially to the hardſhips, either deſignedly undergone,

undergone, or eventually operating for the higheſt happineſs of others. And as for piety, when we conſider it's elevated hopes, and the views it gives us of a probationary ſtate, and of the tendency of afflictions to glorify God and meliorate the human ſoul, we muſt own that it adminiſters to patience a higher cordial than can be afforded by any other hand.

Who can imagine that the devotion and charity of the martyrs, who had in contemplation the happy effects of their ſufferings on the cauſe of religion, did not uphold their patience under the preſſure of the moſt excruciating pains? Who can forget what is ſaid of the moſt illuſtrious goodneſs which was ever oppreſſed, that "for "the joy ſet before him,"—the joy of promoting the divine honours, and ſaving millions of periſhing ſouls,—"he endured "the croſs, and"—what was far more grating to an ingenuous mind—"deſpiſed the "ſhame?

Piety,

Piety, or a ſuitable reſpect for the ſupreme Being, and virtue in general, or a regard to the perſonal and ſocial duties for their own worth and excellence; theſe when entering into friendly alliance, or united in the ſame character, will be mutually ſupported and advanced. That the perſonal and relative good qualities prepare for devotion, is manifeſt: for he who is benevolent himſelf, muſt ſupremely love and reverence that Being who is infinitely benevolent; and the man of juſtice and regulated paſſions is the moſt likely to give a candid reception to divine and religious truth, the means of religious affection. The friendly aſpect of benevolence on devotion, is ſtrongly marked by the moſt affectionate of all the Apoſtles. "If a man "ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, "he is a liar; for he that loveth not his "brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he "love God whom he hath not ſeen?"

On the other ſide, whatſoever advantage piety may derive from virtue, it returns with abundant intereſt. The example of the

the Deity, the extenſion of his knowledge and ſway to our privacies and even hearts, and the other great incentives to religion, are of all means the moſt powerful to reſtrain vice, and enforce the practice of every thing that is uſeful and amiable in human life. Whatever high ſentiments we may form of diſintereſted public ſpirit, (and ſurely, when real, it cannot be too much applauded) yet if genuine and rational religion prevailed more among all orders of men in theſe nations, that is, if more reſpect were paid to the perfections and government of God, and more credit and attention to the doctrine of future recompence, we ſhould ſee both our private and public affairs aſſuming a very different aſpect. "This" ſays the inſpired Writer, "is the victory which "overcometh the world"—or renders us ſuperior to all it's corruptions—"even our "faith."

This leads me to conſider, that each grace or virtue ſtrengthens the reſt, by diminiſhing the power of temptation. The energy of

of devotion for this purpoſe I have already ſuggeſted. Fortitude, or a rational, ſteady, and daring reſolution in favour of a good cauſe, is a powerful protector of piety and moſt of the virtues. How can he be influenced by reproach, by loſs, or by torment, to ſacrifice conſcience, who is endued with a fortitude which cordially deſpiſes them all? Diligence in our reſpective callings, temperance, frugality, and contentment, naturally prevent the operation of thoſe motives which impel men to fraud, rapine, and other modes of injuſtice. Almoſt all the vices promote hypocriſy and falſhood, and all the virtues are favourable to ſincerity and truth.

Some duties are likewiſe friendly to others, by furniſhing and ſecuring the means of reducing them to practice. Frugality, diligence, and contentment, I mentioned before, as weakening the motives to injuſtice. I now point them out, as not only ſupplying the means of doing juſtice, but as equal promoters of charity and the cauſe of religion. "A good man," ſays the Pſalmiſt, "ſheweth favour and lendeth,"—and, in

order to qualify himſelf for ſuch generous offices, as well as to regulate the offices themſelves, with regard to their objects, manner, and degree,—" he will guide his " affairs with diſcretion." To the ſame purpoſe the Apoſtle, in a paſſage ſuited both to the preſent and preceding particular: " Let him that ſtole ſteal no more; but " rather let him labour, working with his " hands the thing which is good, that he " may have to give to him that needeth." And thus finally Solomon: " Honour the " Lord with thy ſubſtance, and with the " firſt-fruits of all thine increaſe; ſo ſhall " thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy " preſſes ſhall burſt out with new wine."

Much more might be offered on this part of the ſubject, but we may eaſily perceive upon the whole, what mutual reliance, or leaning, there is among the virtues and graces; and in what a variety of ways they aſſiſt each other, with regard to their exerciſe, confirmation, and growth. They are like a well-ordered community, in which all the individuals impart reciprocal benefits,

and,

and, according to their ſtations and abilities, promote the general good.

When all theſe things are conſidered, we ſhall not be inclined to wonder that the ſacred writers every where inculcate and inſiſt on univerſal obedience; ſince an obedience limited and partial is not only inſufficient to our happineſs, but is in itſelf very fleeting and uncertain, like the morning cloud, or the early dew which ſoon paſſeth away. "Whatſoever things are true," ſays the Apoſtle, "whatſoever things are venerable, "whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever "things are pure, whatſoever things are "lovely, whatſoever things are of good re-"port; if there be any virtue, and if there "be any praiſe, think on theſe things." In like manner his fellow Apoſtle: "There "are given unto us exceeding great and pre-"cious promiſes, that by theſe you might "become partakers of a divine nature, "having eſcaped the corruption that is "in the world through luſt. And beſides "this, giving all diligence, add to your "faith virtue,"—or rather fortitude—"and

" to fortitude knowledge, and to knowledge
" temperance, and to temperance patience,
" and to patience godlineſs, and to godlineſs
" brotherly kindneſs, and to brotherly kind-
" neſs charity,"—or univerſal good-will.

We may hence learn, what a wrong eſtimate they make of the excellence of true goodneſs, who regard it only in partial and contracted views, never attending to it in it's admirable and complex form, which gains it the title of a divine or godlike nature. To contemplate in this manner the beauty of holineſs, is like viewing the elegant proportion of a temple in ruins, or the beauty of a human body maimed and diſmembered.

We may hence alſo be inſtructed, why the moral and religious pleaſures of thoſe who profeſs an adherence to piety and virtue are generally ſo imperfect. The cauſe we ſhall find in the very imperfect and partial attainments of ſuch perſons. They regard one, or perhaps a few duties, and are totally negligent of all the reſt. How can

they

they hope to experience, at leaſt in any conſiderable degree, that "in the very act of "keeping God's commandments there is "great reward?"—a reward which, if they were uniform in their conduct, they would find at once to prove and exemplify the heavenly felicity.

The ſubject before us will ſuggeſt alſo the reaſon, why the examples of Chriſtians have ſo little influence in reforming a corrupted world. They are themſelves, generally ſpeaking, far, very far from being uniform and conſiſtent. Their example is wretchedly defective. The luſtre of ſome of their actions is clouded and obſcured by the unhappy intervention of others. Imagine only that we beheld a perfect pattern of rectitude and goodneſs. Imagine that we had converſed with the Son of God upon earth. Unleſs we had been totally deprived of ſenſibility, and hardened againſt all the impreſſions which the mild and majeſtic aſpect of integrity is formed to produce upon our hearts, we ſhould have found his every action, every expreſſion, and every look,

ſtrongly operating, either to diſtreſs us with the ſhame of guilt, or inflame us with admiration of goodneſs.

*Finally*; nothing can be more certain or obvious, than that the ſubject now conſidered ſhould teach us unaffected humility; ſhould lead us to make a juſt, which is, uſually, a very moderate eſtimate of our own attainments. Alas! for our numerous imperfections, ſo hurtful to ourſelves, and, if not diſgraceful to our holy religion, ſo far from recommending it's intereſt! But let us not deſpair. Exerting rather every faculty in the moſt ſtrenuous manner, earneſtly applying every advantage, watchful againſt all temptations, and fervent in our addreſſes to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, let us endeavour to be complete in righteouſneſs. Should this be our choice and conduct, the hour is on the wing when the great Judge ſhall appear, and when his faithful followers, with regard to happineſs as well as rectitude, ſhall be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

SERMON

# SERMON V.

## THE GUILT AND DANGER OF HYPOCRISY.

*LUKE* xii. 1, 2.

BEWARE YE OF THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES, WHICH IS HYPOCRISY. FOR THERE IS NOTHING COVERED THAT SHALL NOT BE REVEALED, NEITHER HID THAT SHALL NOT BE KNOWN.

THE chief principles which reſtrain a great part of mankind from enormous wickedneſs, and confine them to ſome regularity, being ſhame and fear, they are perfectly ſatisfied if they can but conceal their vices, and ſubſtitute decency in the place of ſubſtantial goodneſs. God is an inviſible being, and therefore, they little regard him. They ſeldom reflect that he is acquainted with all their privacies. They are not aſhamed to incur his contempt, nor afraid to deſerve his diſpleaſure. Than this foible of mankind, to give it the ſofteſt name, nothing ſurely can be more abſurd. That a rational being, who is capable of reflection and diſcerning in ſome meaſure the remote

conſequences of things, ſhould be aſhamed or afraid of acting wrong in the preſence of a mortal creature, and yet be negligent of the great Creator! What can be more unreaſonable, what can be more inſolent?

But the time will come, when God will clothe himſelf with terror, and avenge the contempt of his government. The time will come, when he will ſhew us the difference between infinite power and the feeble influence of man. Nay, whatever we imagine, the time will come, when the fate we moſt dread, the contempt and hatred of our fellow-creatures, muſt, if we remain impenitent, be unavoidably our's. Our real characters, our ſecret iniquities, our very thoughts of an unlawful kind, ſhall be openly expoſed in the preſence of an aſſembly infinitely greater and more auguſt than ever was convened upon earth. Beſides the eternal God, whom we little regard, and our bleſſed Redeemer, whom we ſeldom remember, the whole human race from Adam to the youngeſt of his offſpring, and the innumerable throngs of angels, will perfectly know

know us, and be acquainted with the moſt retired ſecrets both of our hearts and lives. What an argument againſt hypocriſy! This is the very argument advanced in the words of the text by the founder of our holy religion,—an argument applicable not only to his firſt diſciples, but to the hearers of his goſpel in every age. "Beware ye of the "leaven of the Phariſees, which is hypo- "criſy; for there is nothing covered that "ſhall not be revealed, neither hid that ſhall "not be known."

In this text are contained ſeveral truths, which are obvious, but not the leſs important; which deſerve the moſt ſerious, and yet ſeldom meet with the ſlighteſt attention of mankind. That the real characters of men, and their outward appearance, are often widely different: That, from the fatal influence of example, we are in great danger of being contented with deceitful appearances: That uniform ſincerity is indiſpenſibly requiſite to attain the divine favour: That in the day of judgment our real characters will be laid open; and our moſt ſecret actions and words,

words, nay, even our thoughts, publickly expoſed.

I. The real characters of mankind and their outward appearance are often extremely different. Our Lord, for this very reaſon, cautions his diſciples againſt an imitation of the Phariſees, whoſe hypocriſy is well repreſented under the notion of leaven, as it puffed them up to an immoderate extent of ſelf-importance, and was likely to taint and infect all who were near them. The Phariſees, though held in the utmoſt admiration by the unthinking populace, were guilty of various inconſiſtencies and groſs ſins, which juſtly acquired them the denomination of hypocrites, and occaſioned our Saviour's reproving them with peculiar energy and warmth. They made the exterior acts of religion a cover for the moſt cruel extortion; placed ceremonial trifles in the room of genuine goodneſs, and were extremely ſolicitous to decorate the outſide of their characters, while their hearts abounded with the moſt deteſtable foulneſs and corruption. Theſe, among

among others, are the ſpecious and diſguiſed enormities with which they are charged: "Wo unto you, ſcribes and phariſees, hypo- "crites; for ye devour widows houſes, and "for a pretence make long prayers; there- "fore ye ſhall receive the greater damna- "tion. Wo unto you, ſcribes and phariſees, "hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and "aniſe, and cummin; and have omitted "the weightier matters of the law, judg- "ment, mercy, and faith,"—or faithfulneſs. "Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to "leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, "which ſtrain at a gnat, and ſwallow a "camel. Wo unto you, ſcribes and pha- "riſees, hypocrites; for ye make clean the "outſide of the cup and of the platter; but "within they are full of extortion and ex- "ceſs. Wo unto you, ſcribes and phariſees, "hypocrites; for ye are like unto whited "ſepulchres, which indeed appear beauti- "ful outward, but are within full of dead "men's bones, and of all uncleanneſs. Even "ſo ye alſo outwardly appear righteous unto "men, but within ye are full of hypocriſy "and iniquity."

Here

Here however it ſhould not be forgotten, that not only ſome of thoſe perſons who pretend to ſtrictneſs in religion are hypocrites; but multitudes likewiſe, who do not even ſeem to be religious. Concealed guilt is certainly rendered peculiarly heinous by a ſolemn outward profeſſion. It is, no doubt, extremely ſhocking to claim in pūblic the character of piety, and be vicious and abandoned in private. It is nothing leſs than an inſult on the omniſcient God, to ſeparate the ſocial and perſonal from the religious duties; and will certainly expoſe ſuch double dealers to the peculiar indignation of heaven. But is it not likewiſe ſhocking to pretend a regard to moral virtue, and yet be ſneakingly intemperate, privately cruel to our neareſt relatives, luſtful under the maſk of chaſtity, or diſhoneſt with the appearance of integrity? Nay, if we conſtantly diſcharge the outward duties both of the perſonal and relative kind, but for the ſake of applauſe or intereſt, and not from ſuperiour principles, however we may deſpiſe and inſult the character, we are no better than hypocrites.

It is highly neceſſary to make theſe obſervations without ſuppoſing this or that perſon to be liable to the charge; otherwiſe what faithfulneſs can be ſhewn to the ſouls of men in a ſtate where they are always expoſed to guilt? Upon ſuch important and ſolemn occaſions complaiſance would be no better than deceit, and tenderneſs the greateſt cruelty. The wounds of the ſoul, in order to be thoroughly healed, muſt be probed to the bottom: Nay, when only the infection of a mortal diſeaſe is ſpread, warning ſhould be given, however frightful or alarming; and caution to avoid it, however officious it may be deemed. O that we could prevail upon heedleſs and unthinking man to be anxious for his ſpiritual ſtate! That we could render him ſo uneaſy for a little ſpace, that he might enjoy everlaſting tranquility! That thoughtleſs, undiſturbed, and ſelf-flattering indolence has been the ruin of innumerable ſouls. That attendance on public inſtruction in order to forget it; that ſtrange averſeneſs to ſelf-application; that cold, inſenſible, and too prevailing formality has peopled the world of puniſhment.

Sinners!

Sinners! this is not a ſubject for flattery, nor is this a time to conceal the truth. Without a greater regard to religious ſincerity, and a warmer anxiety for eternal concerns than is too generally ſeen, your fate in the laſt deciſive day will be dreadful, and muſt draw tears from the eye of compaſſion, even now, while it ſeems at a diſtance. Who that hath any tenderneſs for periſhing ſouls can forbear joining in that melancholy exclamation of our bleſſed Redeemer? "O "Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem,—how often would "I have gathered thy children as a hen "gathereth her chickens under her wings; "and ye would not!"

II. There is great danger of our being ſatisfied with mere outward appearances inſtead of inward and ſubſtantial goodneſs, from the fatal influence of example. What elſe can be the meaning of our Saviour's emphatical caution? "Beware ye of the "leaven of the Phariſees, which is hypo-"criſy." The infectious nature of this leaven, in ſimilar caſes, is twice remarked by

by Saint Paul. "Know ye not that a little "leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*

Some perhaps may imagine that hypocriſy can never be contagious. "It is open pro-"faneneſs or immorality, ſay they, which "corrupts the world, and ſecreſy is ſome "atonement for guilt." It is true indeed, the influence of open and undiſguiſed wickedneſs muſt be more general; and profaneneſs, maſked with the appearance of ſanctity, may poſſibly ſometimes even deceive us into goodneſs. But the covering is ſeldom ſo thick as not to be ſeen through by a diſcerning eye. The violence of paſſion will rend it; inattention or temporary intereſt will throw it wholly off, and unhappily diſcover the deformity which it was intended to conceal. In this caſe, if hypocriſy have not ſo extenſive, perhaps it has a more violent influence than open wickedneſs. Tho' it prevail not ſo often, it may prevail more ſtrongly; and though it reach not ſuch multitudes, it may infect in a more fatal degree. Hypocriſy diſcovered will induce ſome ob-

* 1 Cor. v. 6. Gal. v. 9.

ſervers

ſervers to think all religion a pretence, to break the reſtraints by which they were uſually held, and to plunge naked into every kind of iniquity. But others it may influence to put on the ſame diſguiſe, to aſſume pretenſions which are followed with eſteem, and perſonate a character which is ſometimes rewarded with intereſt. Do you imagine, that the Phariſees, though often mutually known, did not, by means of example, attract and encourage each other's imitation? Do you imagine, that even thoſe primitive diſciples of our Lord, who enjoyed the benefit of his perſonal converſe and inſtruction, and who could not but be ſenſible that the Scribes and Phariſees were hypocrites, were not in danger of being led aſtray? Doubtleſs they were. What otherwiſe could occaſion that ſolicitude with which our Saviour cautions his followers againſt the corrupting leaven? Had it not been really corrupting, it would not have been dangerous, nor worth the admonition of a teacher ſent from God. We may therefore be aſſured it was poſſible, nay not improbable in a ſtate of infirmity, that the diſciples

diſciples might imitate a diſguiſe they had detected, and be elated with the expectation of greater ſucceſs than the originals they were induced to follow. "Hypocriſy is "ſometimes indeed diſcovered, but not al-"ways; and we may be ſucceſsful, where "others have failed and been expoſed."

III. With equal evidence the text will inform us, that uniform ſincerity is neceſſary to the favour of God. If hypocriſy had not been attended with the worſt of conſequences, if it had not deprived us of God's approbation, and expoſed us to his certain diſpleaſure with all it's dreadful effects, it would not have merited the reprehenſion of our bleſſed Redeemer, nor extorted from his mouth ſo ſolemn and ſevere a threatening. This truth is ſo evident, that it neither requires nor will admit of a proof, although it often needs to be enforced. The ſame omniſcient and all-perfect Being who demands of us the duties of outward life, inculcates alſo the duties of the heart. The God who commands us to worſhip in ſpirit and in truth, expects us to ſerve him with

ſincerity through the whole tenour of our conduct. The ſame God who injoins an attention to one grace or virtue, has commanded the ſerious and uniform cultivation of all; and, both in his conſtitution of nature and his diſpenſation of grace, hath ſufficiently aſſured us, that we are not fitted for the preſent comforts nor the future rewards of goodneſs, unleſs we are ſincere and uniform.

IV. Our real characters will be laid open in the day of judgment; and our moſt ſecret actions and words, nay our very thoughts, expoſed. "There is nothing covered, that "ſhall not be revealed; neither hid, that "ſhall not be known:" And, as it follows in the next verſe; "Whatſoever ye have "ſpoken in darkneſs, ſhall be heard in the "light; and that which ye have ſpoken in "the ear in cloſets ſhall be proclaimed on "the houſe-tops." Every profane, falſe, or malicious ſpeech you have uttered, however ſecret; every malevolent whiſper which you have breathed; every act of iniquity which you have committed, however now concealed;

concealed; nay, as it follows from the ſame declaration, every thought or deſire of a criminal kind which you have harboured in your breaſts, ſhall certainly be expoſed. "There is *nothing* covered that ſhall not be "revealed; neither hid, that ſhall not be "known." At preſent every thing is known to God, but hereafter ſhall be known univerſally.

All our actions, words, deſires, and paſſions, nay even thoughts, of a ſinful kind, however at preſent hid in the depth of ſecreſy and darkneſs, ſhall then be diſcovered in order to expoſe us to the moſt public and univerſal infamy. In this ſenſe we may apply that remarkable prediction of the prophet: "And many of them,"—or the whole number, which will amount to many— "that ſleep in the duſt of the earth, ſhall "awake, ſome to everlaſting life, and ſome "to ſhame and everlaſting contempt."

All our iniquities will then be detected, not only to convince us ourſelves of the juſtice of our puniſhment, but probably by

way of example in the moral government of God. This ſeems to be the grand purpoſe, ſo far as we can diſcern it, of a general and public judgment; a judgment of which we are aſſured in the New Teſtament with the moſt inconteſtible evidence. If God had ſo pleaſed, individuals, as they were ſummoned off from the ſtage of life, might have been ſeverally allotted to their final ſtate of puniſhment. One great and manifeſt deſign of puniſhment is to anſwer the ends of general example and terror; and as, probably, there will be other ſpecies of rational beings in a ſtate of trial, when we are conſigned to our ſtate of recompence, a knowledge of which may help to confirm even the beſt of created beings, a general and public judgment ſeems, for this reaſon, to be a moſt wiſe appointment.

In the mean while, who can imagine thoſe agonies of ſhame with which the detected ſinner will then be diſtreſſed; when his heart is much more ſenſible than it is at preſent, when he has no amuſement to diſtract his attention, nor examples of proſperous

perous iniquity to harden him in ſhameleſs guilt? Have you ever experienced an uneaſy ſenſation on being diſcovered and ſurpriſed in a fooliſh, or a ſinful action? If you have, you have certainly, for the time at leaſt, been extremely miſerable. What then muſt be the exquiſite anguiſh that will prey upon your hearts, if you prove impenitent in the laſt day, if your ſecret and diſguiſed wickedneſs muſt be then expoſed in the preſence of the whole human race, of all the angels, of the moſt excellent and perfect of created beings, nay of the Redeemer, and even of the all-perfect God? Nothing can exceed it, nothing can equal it, but the following puniſhment of hell.

Let not the offender flatter himſelf with the abſurd expectation that the multitude of ſinners who will bear him company, or his fellow partakers in ſhame, will leſſen the weight of infamy. The mind will then, probably, be to an unſpeakable degree more ſuſceptible of ſhame than it now imagines. The ſinner will ſee millions in a ſituation the moſt honourable and illuſtrious; and the

thought of being united to the company of the ſinful and infamous, will oppreſs him almoſt to diſtraction.

We may here obſerve, that they are the ſecret iniquities of the impenitent alone, which ſhall be detected in that awful judgment; for with regard to thoſe who have in the proper ſeaſon fled to mercy, and exerciſed a practical faith in the bleſſed Redeemer, their ſins, as we are aſſured by the higheſt authority, ſhall not even "be "remembered againſt them." Happy privilege! How wiſe are they who ſecure it betimes, and how infatuated they who neglect it!

But here it muſt be farther conſidered, that the ſins of the impenitent will then be detected, in order to be puniſhed as well as expoſed. A moſt diſtreſſing and overwhelming ſhame will indeed be one part of the puniſhment, but not the only, nor ſevereſt part: For the exquiſite ſenſe of the malignity of guilt, the racking conſciouſneſs of forfeiting the divine favour, the company

company of devils and condemned ſpirits, the darkneſs of the infernal priſon, and the torture of corroding flames:——Theſe particulars of puniſhment will make up a miſery, which "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear "heard, nor hath it ever entered into the "heart of man to conceive." It is in order to inflict on ſinners this deſerved miſery in exact proportion to their ſeveral degrees of guilt, that all the variety of their iniquities ſhall be unfolded and brought to light. A moſt important period! A dreadful inqueſt! In which every individual is nearly concerned, and which none ſhould ever forget.

By way of improvement, we ſee hence, in the firſt place, the excellence of religion, and eſpecially of that which we profeſs. Religion is deſpiſed by the men of the world;—how reaſonably, this ſubject will diſcover. Compare it with human laws. To control the outward actions of mankind, and preſerve the peace of civil ſociety, theſe are not only uſeful, but neceſſary. But they have little effect on the heart. A man

may

may be perfectly conformable to human laws, and yet far from a good man. Nay, he may ſecretly violate them, and contrive to eſcape their penalty. But the laws of religion extend to the inward parts. They lay reſtrictions upon our paſſions and appetites. Their aweful influence follows us into our retirements, and is of power to render us the ſame in ſecret, as if ſeen by ten thouſand witneſſes. They declare with the moſt ſolemn and commanding authority, that "there is nothing covered that ſhall "not be revealed, neither hid, that ſhall "not be known."

Again; compare religion with that principle of honour, which is ſo much boaſted and idolized in higher life. Honour, in the ſenſe now mentioned, is the deſire of reputation, or of general approbation and applauſe; which manifeſtly can have no influence on our hearts and ſecret actions, is governed by changeable faſhion, and may ſometimes happen to lead us into the worſt enormities. True religion, on the other hand, is uniformly the ſame in private and in

in public, in every change of time or place, with reference to our lives, and with regard to our inmoſt hearts. If we deſire but in the ſecond place the honour which proceeds from men, and in the firſt and principal place, that "which cometh from God only," we ſhall carefully guard againſt every iniquity; we ſhall be the ſame in ſecret that we are in the moſt general and auguſt preſence; we ſhall faithfully regard every poſſible duty, relative to God, to our fellow creatures and ourſelves. As therefore honour is a very defective, inſufficient, and precarious guide, ſo true religion is the moſt perfect and comprehenſive principle, the beſt and the nobleſt rule of conduct after which our natures can aſpire.

Hence alſo we ſee the neceſſity of the moſt accurate, impartial, and ſerious ſelf-examination, of which we are capable. Why will mankind be wilfully ignorant of their own ſpiritual ſtate, when hereafter they muſt be obliged to know it to their unſpeakable ſhame and ſorrow? Why in their moſt important concerns will they impoſe upon themſelves,

themſelves, as they generally do, through inattention, ſelf-flattery, and the force of the moſt inveterate habits? To neglect ſelf-inquiry when we are ſo in danger of deceit, is ſhutting our eyes, and ruſhing forward, though ſufficiently warned that the bottomleſs pit lies directly in our way.

To conclude all; let us do nothing of which we need be aſhamed in the laſt deciſive day. Whatever practice we indulge in our ſecret retirements, whatever habit we cheriſh in the inward receſſes of our hearts; let us frequently tell ourſelves with the moſt ſolemn energy, THIS HABIT AND THIS PRACTICE WILL BE MADE PUBLIC IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

SERMON

# SERMON VI.

## ON THE NATURE AND DANGER OF ILL COMPANY.

*PSALM* i. 1.

BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT WALKETH NOT IN THE COUNSEL OF THE UNGODLY, NOR STANDETH IN THE WAY OF SINNERS, NOR SITTETH IN THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL.

THE ſocial principle is one of the moſt valuable bleſſings beſtowed upon us by the God of nature. But as the beſt things, when corrupted, often become the worſt, ſo this, when ill managed and indiſcreetly applied, is a ſource of the bittereſt evils. We love ſociety, and happy is it for us that we do; for, without this inſtinct, the welfare of the public and of individuals could no more be ſecured, than the inanimate world could be kept together without the great principle of attraction. But is there no diſtinction to be made? Is there no prudence to be uſed in the choice of our company; and are all aſſociates equally eligible and ſafe? Infinitely far from it. For

as

as the ſociety of the wiſe and good is inſtructive and every way uſeful; ſo that of the wicked is not only unprofitable, but threatens us with all ſorts of calamities. The unaſſiſted light of nature ſo clearly diſcovered theſe dreadful conſequences, that a certain lawgiver of the antient heathens, in order to ſecure the innocent and diſgrace the guilty, endeavoured to reſtrain men from ill company by an expreſs law enforced with ſevere penalties; reaſonably expecting, that unleſs this danger were guarded againſt, and this edict put in execution, all his other regulations would be of little effect.

In ſhort, as corrupt company gives double force to every temptation, and may be juſtly ſaid to be all temptations in one; there is not a juſter, a more conciſe, or more efficacious maxim, which miniſters, parents, or others concerned for the cauſe of virtue and happineſs can recommend, than this before us in the text: "Bleſſed is the man that "walketh not in the counſel of the un-"godly, nor ſtandeth in the way of ſinners, "nor ſitteth in the ſeat of the ſcornful."

By

By the ungodly and ſinners in this declaration of the royal Pſalmiſt, are meant thoſe perſons who oppoſe in practice, though not in ſpeculation, the principles and precepts of goodneſs; thoſe who diſobey the laws of virtue and religion, though they do not deſpiſe and deride them. But the ſcornful are thoſe who ridicule what is ſober and ſacred, either for want of conſcientious principles, or elſe in order to make themſelves eaſy and to be kept in countenance by proſelytes, againſt conſcience. To walk in the counſel of the ungodly, is to be influenced by their advice and example for a time. To ſtand in their way, or path, is to continue aſſociating with, and imitating ſuch men: But to ſit in the ſeat of the ſcornful, is at leaſt abandoning ourſelves to the ſociety and influence of profane ſcoffers, if not taking the chair in another ſenſe, and ſetting ourſelves at their head. It is a real and dangerous ſin to take the firſt ſtep; a much worſe to indulge in the ſecond; but the third is heinous in the extreme.

When

When we view on all ſides round this important ſubject, we may obſerve relating to it four particulars, which demand our ſerious attention: To ſtate in a clear and explicit manner the character of the ill company we are required to avoid; or, in other words, what ſort of perſons may, in a moral and religious ſenſe, be accounted ill company. To ſhew what it is to aſſociate with them in the ſenſe forbidden. To oppoſe this practice with the moſt powerful reſtraint of motives: And to confute ſome deceitful and ſuperficial pleas which are ſometimes advanced in it's favour.

I. The firſt thing, of which I have already given hints in explaining the text, is to ſhew what ſort of perſons may be accounted ill company in a moral and religious ſenſe. And here I might repreſent as one claſs of ſociety to be avoided, thoſe who will prove, though not immediately dangerous, yet entirely uſeleſs to us in point both of knowledge and profit. It is certainly a great folly, and diſcovers a very mean diſpoſition, to aſſociate frequently, and without any particular call or connection in life,

life, even with ſuch perſons as theſe. It will render us contemptible in the ſight of the wiſe and good. It will give us a trifling and worthleſs turn; nay, by degrees, will inſpire us with a diſreliſh to every uſeful engagement, and at length, may have all the corrupting influence of the moſt abandoned ſociety. Beſides, to ſay the leaſt of it, it is a ſad expence of that ineſtimable time, for which we have ſufficient uſe, and which, doubtleſs, might be more innocently, if not more laudably employed. Solomon, whoſe dignity, wiſdom, and experience, as well as inſpiration, give him a claim to be heard upon this ſubject, ſeems, if I miſtake not, to repreſent perſons as unfit companions purely upon the ſcore of their ignorance. "Go from the preſence of a fooliſh man, "when thou perceiveſt not in him the lips "of knowledge."

But, in truth, there is little occaſion to enlarge upon this as a diſtinct particular; as there are few men who will be quite uſeleſs to us without being immediately hurtful, and ſetting us an example poſitively and directly

directly ill. There are very few, if any, in a ſtate of neutrality between virtue and vice, religion and profaneneſs;—few who neglect duty without proceeding to commit ſin. So that in this, as well as another ſenſe, the Saviour might ſay, "They who are not for "me, are againſt me."

I ſhall therefore, according to the hint given in the text, diſtribute ill company into two claſſes, thoſe who habitually tranſgreſs, and thoſe alſo who deſpiſe and ridicule the rules of virtue and religion.

*Firſt*; Thoſe who habitually or groſsly tranſgreſs the laws of virtue and religion. Indeed, did we reſolve to ſhun all ſociety 'till we met with perſons who were abſolutely perfect, we ſhould ſoon have reaſon to turn hermits, and take up our abode in the deſert. The beſt of men have their blemiſhes and defects, but they endeavour as much as poſſible to leſſen them. The worthy parts of their character are more numerous and prevalent; ſo that their company is not only ſafe but uſeful. Nay, they have

have the ingenuouſneſs to regret, on proper occaſions, their own failings and tranſient miſcarriages; which is no other, in effect, than hinting to us an admonition to be no farther followers of them, than they are of the Saviour. It is true, when perſons of profeſſed piety fall into any conſiderable and notorious ſin, their example is, in one reſpect, more dangerous than that of habitual offenders, as it gives a kind of authority, and ſanction to vice, of which the other is incapable; for which reaſon they are peculiarly cautious to avoid all negligence and remiſſneſs. But perſons of this character inſtantly repent, forſake their iniquity, and double their watchfulneſs for the time to come. To follow them in the former, and not in the latter inſtance, to imitate the ſin but not the penitence of St. Peter, were abſurdly inconſiſtent, and would argue a moſt corrupt heart. Their example, and conſequently their ſociety, muſt be, upon the whole, a living example of wiſdom, virtue, and devotion.

It was ſaid therefore, under this particular, that thoſe who habitually or groſsly

tranſgreſs the rules of virtue and religion, are among the perſons whoſe company we ſhould carefully avoid,—not only thoſe who are habitually guilty of violating all or moſt of the divine commands, but thoſe alſo who indulge themſelves in any one groſs iniquity. The drunkard, the fornicator, the adulterer, the laſcivious talker, the ſwearer, the profaner of the ſabbath, the diſhoneſt, the hard-hearted and malicious,—and I would add alſo the evil ſpeaker, if above one in a hundred of mankind were free from this vice;—all theſe, and the like offenders, as far as the intercourſe of life will admit, ſhould be avoided as much as a peſtilence. "Depart from me, ye evil doers," ſays the holy Pſalmiſt. "My ſon," ſays the wiſeſt among men, "if ſinners entice thee, conſent "thou not.—My ſon, walk not thou in the "way with them; refrain thy foot from "their path." And elſewhere more particularly; "He that followeth vain perſons "is void of underſtanding." Again; "He "that is a companion of riotous men ſhameth "his father." Once more; "Make no "friendſhip with an angry man, and with "a furious

"a furious man thou ſhalt not go." To the ſame purpoſe, in another inſtance, the Apoſtle of the Gentiles: "I wrote to you "in an epiſtle not to company with forni- "cators." If the contagion even of one of theſe diſeaſes be ſtrong, it may unhappily taint us upon a nearer approach, and expoſe us to eternal death.

The next and worſt denomination of ill company, in a moral and religious ſenſe, are they who not only violate, but deſpiſe and ridicule, the principles and rules of good-neſs. The former ſort are indeed wicked and ſufficiently dangerous, and ought to be guarded againſt with all poſſible care. But then they have ſome conſcience left. They do not pretend to juſtify their guilt, nor profeſs to be vicious upon principle. Whereas thoſe with whom we are now concerned are not ſatisfied with being wicked themſelves, but ſcoff at and inſult thoſe who are not ſo abſurd as to reſemble them. Nay, in ſome inſtances, either in ſpite of conſcience, or becauſe their conſciences are totally ſilenced, they take upon them to inſult the

Majeſty of Heaven, and hold in deriſion the laws of eternal rectitude. Or if they are not quite ſo abandoned as to deny all difference between good and evil, if they allow the name, and aſſume ſome form of religion, yet when they ſee any inſtances of ſober virtue and ſerious piety, they ſtill make them the objects of their ſenſeleſs ridicule. "We are exceedingly filled," ſays the Pſalmiſt, "we are exceedingly filled "with contempt. Our ſoul is exceedingly "filled with the ſcorning of thoſe that are "at eaſe, and with the contempt of the "proud." St. Paul cautions us againſt the ſociety of thoſe perſons (the Epicureans were thoſe of whom he originally ſpoke) who, diſbelieving a future ſtate, pleaded for licentious living. "Let us eat and drink; "for to-morrow we die. Be not deceived: "Evil communications corrupt good man-"ners." St. Peter ſpeaks of "ſcoffers, "who ſhould come in the laſt days, walking "after their own luſts," and deriding the promiſe of our Lord's ſecond appearance.* He repreſents thoſe of a ſimilar character,

* 2 Peter iii. 3, 4.

in

in the preceding chapter, as "ſpeaking evil "of the things they underſtand not." And in his former epiſtle, he deſcribes the Gentiles as thinking it ſtrange in good chriſtians, that they ran not with them into the ſame exceſs of riot; and ſpeaking evil of them on account of that very ſobriety, for which they deſerved to be applauded.* Theſe are the perſons, together with the habitual offenders before repreſented, whoſe ſociety we ſhould carefully ſhun.

Now leſt thoſe, who aſſociate with habitual and groſs ſinners, ſhould think themſelves tolerably ſafe, becauſe they keep at a diſtance from the ſcorners and deriders of all goodneſs, which is indeed a caution ſcarcely to be expected from ſuch perſons, I muſt here obſerve that the company of the one will bring us, in a ſhort time, to reliſh even that of the other. Wickedneſs, you are well apprized, is of a growing nature; and he that "walketh in the counſel of the "ungodly," will not only continue "in the "way of ſinners," but very ſoon, likewiſe, "ſit in the ſeat of the ſcornful."

* 1 Peter iv. 3, 4.

II. We

II. We are now to repreſent, in the ſecond place, what it is to aſſociate with the wicked, in the ſenſe forbidden by religion.

And here it is manifeſt at firſt ſight, that it is not being in their company through accident or neceſſity, which reaſon and the ſacred oracles prohibit; but making choice of ſuch perſons for our intimates and friends; being more frequently in ſight of their ill example, or in the hearing of their ſinful diſcourſe, than we have either chance or neceſſity to alledge in our defence: The apoſtle himſelf makes this diſtinction, in a noted paſſage, which, in part, I have already cited: "I wrote unto you in an epiſtle, "not to company with fornicators. Yet "not altogether with the fornicators of this "world, or with the covetous, or extorti-"oners, or with idolaters; for then ye muſt "needs go out of the world." The wicked and profane are truly ſo numerous in this world, that the intercourſe of buſineſs, the civilities of life, and ſometimes mere accident, will unavoidably bring us to meet them. But here it is proper to obſerve, that

if

if the young and thoughtleſs will be conſtantly pleading ſuch reaſons in caſes where there is no foundation for them, it is a ſign that their hearts are already corrupted; and they dreadfully wrong themſelves in their higheſt and beſt intereſt.

Beſides the allowable caſes already mentioned, it is poſſible that ſometimes a man of wiſdom, authority, and eſtabliſhed virtue, may deſignedly give his company to the diſſolute and vicious, eſpecially thoſe in younger life, with ſome reaſonable views of reclaiming them. Thus our Lord was very unjuſtly cenſured by the bigotted and ſupercilious phariſees, for eating with publicans and ſinners. His anſwer is both benevolent and wiſe. He ſaid unto them, "They that "be whole need not a phyſician, but they "that are ſick. But go ye and learn what "that meaneth, I will have mercy and not "ſacrifice:"—This intercourſe, otherwiſe forbidden, is lawful with a view of kindneſs;—"for I am not come to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance." This however is an affair in which thoſe who are

fond of ill company have no ſort of concern. They, it is manifeſt, are little troubled with a reforming ſpirit. For ſuch a work they are totally unqualified. They are in too much danger of being ſtill more perverted, or led into greater wickedneſs; and, if really ſolicitous to become ſuch violent reformers, they ſhould certainly begin with themſelves.

We ſee then, upon the whole, that the aſſociating with ill company, forbidden by wiſdom and religion, is habitually chooſing ſuch perſons for our intimates and friends; and frequently joining them without any reaſonable and juſt plea either of neceſſity or chance.

III. But now, the principal deſign of this diſcourſe is the conſideration of thoſe powerful motives which ought in reaſon to prevent our aſſociating with ſinful and profane perſons. The principal are theſe four. *Firſt*; our joining habitually in ſuch company will forfeit us the eſteem of the wiſe and good, and render our own characters at beſt ſuſpected. *Secondly*; the wicked are by no means

means ſafe companions, nor any way worthy of our truſt. *Thirdly*; the vices, into which they lead us, will ruin us with regard to our temporal concerns. And *fourthly*, wicked aſſociates, by corrupting our morals, ruin us with regard to eternity. The laſt of theſe motives will chiefly influence thoſe who have ſtill the remains of a tender conſcience; but the three former are of a nature to work upon the mere worldly mind.

*Firſt*; Our habitually joining the company of the wicked will forfeit us the eſteem of the wiſe and good, and render our own characters at beſt ſuſpected. Good perſons are inclined, in that caſe, by their ruling diſpoſitions, and obliged by their principles to deſpiſe and ſhun us. They will naturally judge of us by the ſociety we moſt frequent, and, unleſs indeed they have hope of reforming us, are injoined by an apoſtolical precept to keep us at a diſtance. "If any "man," ſays St. Paul, "obey not our "word by this epiſtle, note that man, and "have no company with him, that he may "be aſhamed." If they obſerve us to be fond

fond of joining the drunkard, the laſcivious, and the ſwearer, or profane; they muſt either think that we are addicted to thoſe vices ourſelves, or at leaſt that they are tolerable to us, and will ſoon gain our hearts. Beſides, how can good perſons have any eſteem for us and endure our company, when they know us to be very conſtant in that ſociety, where their principles and practices are continually miſrepreſented and reviled?

Whatever we may imagine, it is an ineſtimable loſs to forfeit the eſteem and friendſhip of the wiſe and good; for they are the beſt able to ſerve us, not only in our ſpiritual concerns, which perhaps we deſpiſe; but in our temporal, which, if we alſo undervalue, we are loſt indeed. In reality, even perſons who have no regard for virtue and religion, if they ſee us abandoned to ill company, will never confide in us with regard to any important affair, nor, if poſſible, be ever concerned with us: For there are worldly men, who, from motives of intereſt, avoid ſome ſorts of ill company themſelves, and have a conſtant diſtruſt and contempt

contempt of thoſe who are lovers of ſuch company. Nay more, it will frequently happen that the very partakers of our ſinful pleaſures, who are too well acquainted with us, will fear to be concerned with us in any ſerious and important buſineſs.

This leads me to obſerve, *ſecondly*, that ſuch perſons are not ſafe companions, nor deſerve any truſt from us. Now ſurely, truſt them we muſt, in ſome reſpect or other, if we make them our conſtant aſſociates. We ſhall truſt them with our ſecrets, and ſome ſecrets perhaps not much to our credit or our ſafety; and we ſhall truſt them, in general, with our characters. Nay, we put very much in their power our credulity and good nature, upon which they will very probably impoſe. We cannot certainly be ſo weak as to imagine that ſuch perſons, of whoſe vices we are ſo well apprized, and who have regard neither for God nor man, will much heſitate to betray and injure us, whenever they are led to do ſo by any temporary intereſt.

*Thirdly*;

*Thirdly*; They will lead us into vices that muſt ruin us in our temporal concerns. What! are we ſo infatuated as to have no regard either for time or eternity? Or do we abſurdly imagine that idleneſs, lewdneſs, and riot, have no tendency to hurt us in the intereſt either of the one or the other? Alas! how many do we ſee around us, who have ſacrificed to the luſt of ill company all the comforts and the beſt proſpects of life. Nay, what multitudes, when about to die by the hands of the executioner—an awful moment when the truth is ſeldom diſguiſed,—what multitudes, who, at that moment, aſcribe their ruin either to the accurſed influence of ill company, or elſe to it's conſtant attendant, the profanation of the Lord's day! The progreſs is no more than natural from idleneſs and ill company to extravagance, from extravagance to want, from want to diſhoneſty, and from thence to the fatal tree. If however the conſequences ſhould not be ſo dreadful as thoſe we have deſcribed, yet the imprudence and other vices, of whatever kind, which we learn in corrupt ſociety, muſt be injurious to us in our temporal concerns.

*Fourthly*;

*Fourthly*; Aſſociates of this ſort, by corrupting our morals, ruin us in our eternal intereſt. I ſuppoſe it is chiefly with reference to ſpiritual wiſdom and folly that Solomon ſpeaks when he ſays, "He that "walketh with wiſe men ſhall be wiſe, but "a companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed." They expoſe us to the anger of that omnipotent juſtice, which can deſtroy both ſoul and body in hell.

Ill ſociety has a tendency to corrupt our morals by a variety of ways. Vice, by being frequently ſeen, becomes familiar to the mind, loſes it's horror, and appear leſs deformed; ſo that the perſon who at firſt beholds it with abhorrence, comes at laſt to practice it in the moſt ſhocking degree, without the leaſt remorſe. It is firſt frightful, then familiar, then tolerable, and at laſt pleaſing and inviting. And thus, partly, it is, that he, who was the child of many prayers and tears, bleſt with the moſt regular and pious education, and accuſtomed to no objects but thoſe of virtue and devotion, ſinks at length into the deepeſt abyſs of profligacy.

Again;

Again; mankind are greatly prone to imitation, eſpecially of thoſe with whom they moſt conſtantly converſe. When therefore we are chiefly converſant with the fooliſh and the diſſolute; their temper, language, and actions will be copied out in our own, and the improvement we have made under our great maſters in iniquity will ſoon become conſpicuous to the world around us.

*Finally*; The deluſive perſuaſions of wicked and abandoned men will entice us into the practice of vice. We either have not the courage to withſtand their repeated ridicule, or elſe are, at length, fooled into the notion that they are the only wiſe. When we frequently hear ſerious piety and ſtrict virtue ſcornfully derided; all goodneſs repreſented as formality and preciſeneſs; the failings of good men, and thoſe we were wont to reverence, induſtriouſly pointed out; themſelves painted as hypocrites, and the reſtraints of ſobriety expoſed under the notion of ſlavery; what can be expected from ſuch repeated leſſons, but that the beſt principles of education, the miniſtrations of the goſpel, and the

the counſels of kind friends will be abſolutely forgotten and loſt? The danger, in truth, is ſo unſpeakably great, that, to be ſafe in ſuch ſociety, we ought to be nothing leſs than angels. The wiſe and good, who endeavour to be undefiled and ſeparate from ſinners, find it ſufficiently difficult to maintain their integrity; but if all caution is thrown aſide, and eſpecially by the young and inexperienced, if they ruſh into the councils of the wicked; to expect ſafety will be altogether as abſurd as to expect health in a houſe infected.

Let us now hear the pleas which are uſually advanced for aſſociating with the wicked and profane.

And *firſt*, it is ſaid, that with all their faults, they are good-natured, and therefore their company is deſireable. So, I ſuppoſe, was the Harlot, mentioned by Solomon; who enticed the unthinking youth by her fair ſpeeches, and led him to remedileſs ruin. And ſo likewiſe was the Devil, when he offered Eve the apple, and promiſed our Saviour

Saviour all the kingdoms of the world. Why ſhould we thus abuſe that excellent word, good-nature, which does not mean a blind compliance of one perſon with another's vices, but ought to intend a diſcreet benevolence, promoting our real good. Is it good-natured to lead us, with or without deſign, to temporal and eternal deſtruction? Will their good-nature be of any uſe to us when abandoned to beggary and contempt? Will it ought avail us, when expoſed to the divine diſpleaſure, when trembling before the tribunal of Jeſus Chriſt, or groaning in the flames of hell? At this rate, a man may be worthleſs in every ſingle reſpect, and tainted with almoſt every poſſible vice, and yet be, withal, good-natured. Infamous plea! Let it never once be heard.

It is alledged of ſuch perſons that they are chearful, and therefore, that their company is inviting. Which is only ſaying, in other words, that you are allured by ſome degree or kind of temptation, or elſe you would not run into danger. It may poſſibly be true. And indeed, what folly or vice is there, to which

which we have no temptation to allure us? In the mean while, is there no cheerfulneſs to be found among the wiſe, virtuous, and devout? I never yet could underſtand that a decent and manly cheerfulneſs was forbidden by religion; and, in truth, the religious, the man of integrity and conſcious goodneſs, has the only juſt reaſon to be cheerful of all perſons in the world. But then, if we are determined, for the laughter of fools, which Solomon compares to the crackling of thorns under a pot; if for this we are finally determined to reſign every comfort of the preſent, and every hope of the future world, I have nothing farther to advance.

In the laſt place, perhaps it may be ſaid, that to avoid the company of this or that ſet of men, becauſe they deride our religious principles and practices, would be a mark of a contracted party ſpirit. To avoid then the ſingle vice of a party ſpirit, we muſt run the hazard of all other vices united, and abandon the joint intereſts both of time and eternity! But, ſurely, we may prove ourſelves ſufficiently free from a party ſpirit,

by eſteeming and ſhewing a friendly diſpoſition to the wiſe and good of all denominations, and by candour, compaſſion, and benevolent offices to the worſt of men, with whatever party they herd. Theſe are but reaſonable duties. But to aſſociate conſtantly with the immoral and irreligious, in order to ſhun the imputation of party ſpirit, is diſguiſing guilt with the moſt empty, the moſt ſhameleſs plea that ever frenzy invented. Let us always adhere to the party of the wiſe and good, nor ever be intimate with the wicked, though they call themſelves by the ſame name with ourſelves: And then we ſhall ſhew a ſpirit which eternal wiſdom will approve.

And now, what words ſhall I farther find to addreſs eſpecially the younger part of my audience, and deter them from this vice? I would hope that it is not chargeable upon any who hear me; but to avoid it requires our beſt caution, and the danger is infinite in ſuch a world. The eternal God is my witneſs, before whoſe tribunal, I, as well as you, muſt one day ſtand, that I am diſtreſſed

treſſed at my very heart for your welfare, both in the preſent and future world. Would God I could touch the ſenſibilities of your nature, and influence your inmoſt ſouls with the importance of this great ſubject. By the deſire you entertain of paſſing with comfort through the preſent world:—By your regard to ſafety, to intereſt, to reputation, to the eſteem of the wiſe and good:—By the reverence you owe your parents and beſt friends; by the inſtructions they have given you, the example they have ſet you, the kindneſs they have ſhewn you, the prayers they have offered, the tears they have ſhed, the bitter agonies they have felt upon your account:—By the miniſtrations of the goſpel, the intereſts of religion, and your own everlaſting welfare:—By the authority of God, the wonders of redeeming love, the advantages of the goſpel, the pangs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt upon the accurſed tree:—By the apprehenſion of the future judgment, the hope of everlaſting glory, and the fear of eternal ruin:—By all theſe conſiderations, I warn, I admoniſh, I intreat you, I ſolemnly charge you in his preſence who is the judge

of all, that you would fly from corrupt ſociety as the worſt and moſt execrable of evils. Fly to honeſt occupations, to the purſuit of knowledge ſuitable to your ranks, to the converſe of the wiſe and good, to the various offices of virtue and devotion, and eſpecially to the throne of God, that he, who is able, may preſerve you from this worſt of plagues.

In the mean while, let the virtuous and devout be careful to render their ſociety every way agreeable to thoſe around them; by giving their religion the moſt inviting aſpect, by affability and friendlineſs, by benevolent offices, and by conducting even reproof itſelf with the moſt engaging tenderneſs. The company of the wicked will not then be ſo much coveted, for the ſake either of good-nature or cheerfulneſs. Let parents alſo be ſolicitous not only to give their children the wiſeſt inſtructions, and ſet them the moſt improving examples, (for of all ill examples their's would be the moſt dangerous) but always place and diſpoſe of them in ſuch a manner, as far as is poſſible,

that

that the contagion of wickedneſs may not ſo eaſily reach them.

And *finally*, may He, the moſt powerful and kind, the univerſal parent, the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, ſo effectually influence all our hearts, and direct our lives, that we, in our turn, may prove exemplary to the generation following, and be at length admitted to that beſt of ſociety, the bleſſed congregation of the righteous.

# SERMON VII.

## THE INFLUENCE OF CORRUPT EXAMPLE.

IT were very deſirable to ſee the generality of mankind devout and virtuous, not only becauſe it would produce a greater quantity of happineſs in the world, but becauſe their example would have a ſtrong and uſeful influence upon the conduct of their fellow creatures. Thoſe who were not quite untractable, might then, by divine bleſſing, be allured into goodneſs; others of a more ſtubborn temper, and more violently bent upon vice, would be reſtrained within narrower bounds, and kept to ſome outward regularity; and thoſe who were well diſpoſed, though unexperienced, would ſoon be confirmed in piety.

But unhappily, it is too obvious in fact, that a great part of the human race are crouding the road to perdition; ſo that it is a much more dangerous rule, in point of practice, to follow the many than the few.

The wiſe and good ſee conſtant reaſon to lament it. Parents, in particular, when they have given their children the beſt inſtruction, when they have ſet them the beſt example, that human frailty will admit, avoided the extremes of auſterity and over-indulgence, and in all the bitterneſs of parental anxiety recommended their offſpring to God; yet frequently ſee their endeavours blaſted by the influence of a corrupt world. In ſhort, the infection is every where ſpread, and as ſoon as a young perſon, eſpecially, ſteps out into life, it is almoſt certain that he will be tainted. The inſtructions, the example, the prayers, and the tears of his beſt friends are forgotten, or elſe, which is far worſe, remembered to be ridiculed and deſpiſed. This being the caſe, it cannot be improper to enforce the exhortation contained in thoſe words of Moſes, or rather of the eternal God, by the mouth of Moſes,[a] "THOU SHALT NOT "FOLLOW A MULTITUDE TO DO EVIL."

They were ſpoken indeed originally, with a particular view to caution every Iſraelite,

[a] Exodus xxii. 2.

when

when called to give evidence in judiciary cauſes, againſt joining with falſe witneſſes. "Thou ſhalt not raiſe a falſe report: Put "not thine hand with the wicked to be an "unrighteous witneſs. Thou ſhalt not fol- "low a multitude to do evil; neither ſhalt "thou ſpeak in a cauſe to decline after "many to wreſt judgment." But they are equally applicable to all inſtances of iniquity, to which we can be allured by the pattern of a ſinful world.

I ſhall not here conſider particularly the ſin and danger of ill company, but ſhall dwell upon the bad conſequences of corrupt example in a more extenſive view. In treating the ſubject, I ſhall therefore endeavour to repreſent the manner in which faſhionable and prevailing vice works upon the mind, and then advance ſome arguments that may diſſuade us from the imitation of ſuch popular wickedneſs.

Faſhionable and prevailing vice works upon the mind, in the firſt place, by applying to that diſpoſition of the human heart, which

which naturally inclines us to imitate thoſe around us. This natural propenſity was given us by the author of our frame, in order to draw more tightly the bonds of human ſociety, or unite us together more firmly in peace and friendſhip. That we really have it is manifeſt to the ſlighteſt obſervation: We reſemble thoſe who fall under our notice, and eſpecially thoſe who are neareſt us, in their dreſs, their language, and their manner; which are the chief grounds of diſtinction in different nations. This imitative faculty is however not confined to outward appearances, but extends even to our tempers and morals; and, under the direction of divine grace, eſpecially did good example more generally prevail, might be improved to the beſt of purpoſes. But the example of the majority generally prevails; it has greater weight with the heedleſs and incautious; it glides in upon their inclinations and deſires, or rather hurries them away like an irreſiſtible torrent. When the unexperienced and thoughtleſs ſee the majority of mankind corrupt; when they obſerve them ſpending all their time in pleaſure,

indulging

indulging intemperance, plunging in ſenſuality, and laughing at all ſerious religion; they begin to think this a moſt joyous life, they feel a bias, a kind of mad impulſe to the ſame practices, and a ſtrong emulation to live in the ſame manner. They were wont perhaps to reverence the ſabbath, to have ſome regard to divine inſtitutions, and behave with a decent ſobriety. They derived from education ſome dread of iniquity, and could not offend without reluctance and even horror. But now they have ſeen more of the world, now they have remarked the general practice, they are impatient of reſtraint. Regularity is ſlavery, ſobriety is ſtiffneſs, religion is ſuperſtition, and all human felicity conſiſts in gaiety and madneſs. They conform to the world without any reſerve; they rejoice in their eſcape from the fetters of education; and to avoid the ſuſpicion of retaining their former ſcruples, they endeavour to diſtinguiſh themſelves by all manner of folly and debauchery.

*Secondly*; Prevailing wickedneſs draws imitation by ſhame. "How can ye believe

"—that

" —that is, in a practical manner—ſays our " bleſſed Redeemer, who receive honour " one of another, and ſeek not the honour " which cometh from God only?" When the world in general are corrupt and abandoned, they are not content with practiſing wickedneſs themſelves, but deſpiſe and deride the appearances of goodneſs in others. According to them, the religious are gloomy and narrow ſouls, who are frightened at ſhadows, have no taſte for the pleaſures of life, and envy others what they have no capacity or no reſolution to reliſh themſelves. They repreſent them as proud of an odd ſingularity; as cenſoriouſly condemning the innocent amuſements of their fellow creatures; or elſe, which is ſtill worſe, as artful hypocrites, publicly blaming what in private they both love and practiſe. They then dreſs up their characters in the coat of folly, treat their worſhip and their ſerioufneſs with a ſneer, and deſcribe as ridiculous what is really an honour to the angels of God. " Our ſoul," ſays the Pſalmiſt, " is ex- " ceedingly filled with the ſcorning of thoſe " that are at eaſe, and with the contempt " of the proud."

Now

Now perſons who are unſettled in virtue and religion, and eſpecially the younger part of mankind, are apt to be extremely affected with this contempt, this ſenſeleſs grin of impiety, which is, in general, contrary to the conſciences even of ſcoffing ſinners themſelves. Such unſtable ſouls are in great fear of being ſingular. They firſt conceal, as much as poſſible, their attachment to ſerious goodneſs, they then grow weary of all reſtraint, and at length, by degrees, they vie with their corrupteſt neighbours in all the indulgences of guilt.

The ill example of the multitude operates likewiſe by the means of fear. Sometimes in an age of prevailing iniquity, men have an intereſt, at leaſt a preſent and contracted intereſt, to ſerve by imitating ſinners. There is ſome perſon, or ſome community, whom they hope to pleaſe, and to whom they expect to recommend themſelves, by joining in their follies and vices. The profane and debauched have too frequently a powerful influence: They often command the affairs of the world; and whom ſhould they careſs

or

or countenance but their companions in rioting and lewdneſs? Indeed this expectation is in many inſtances diſappointed; for the moſt diſſolute, in matters of ſecular buſineſs, had rather have intercourſe with the ſober and virtuous, than with thoſe of their own ſort. But ſtill, ſuch is the hope of ſelfiſh men; and ſometimes, for the ſake of making a convert from ſobriety to wickedneſs, it is a hope which is gratified. The Apoſtle complains, that "Demas had for-"ſaken him, having loved this preſent "world."

In other inſtances, there may happen to be certain diſcouragements thrown in the way of piety; ſome ſuffering or loſs may attend it; although, generally ſpeaking, we are ſure that godlineſs, carried to it's whole length and accompanied by it's ſiſter virtues, prudence, integrity, and diligence, has the promiſe and poſſeſſion of this as well as the future life. But whenever it happens, as it muſt frequently happen in a corrupt world, and even in ages which are free from the moſt violent perſecution, that men muſt

ſuffer

ſuffer for the ſake of a good conſcience, the irreſolute and fearful will inſtantly chooſe the worſt ſide, and ſacrifice integrity and their own ſouls at the altar of intereſt.

*Laſtly*; The practice of the multitude excites in us a ſecret ſurmiſe, that our apoſtacy will be excuſed by reaſon of the general example. Sinners indeed cannot deliberately, and in form, believe that they are ſafe in their numbers, and can give each other protection; but yet, as a ſlight temptation will generally ſerve, a momentary fancy of this kind, frequently returning, will ſufficiently anſwer the purpoſe, and do more to harden the heart, than all the motives of a religious kind to give it ſenſibility and ſoftneſs. They ſecretly flatter and pleaſe themſelves with the thought that they have a large company to keep them in countenance; and perhaps, hope that the violent temptation ariſing from ſuch powerful example, will excuſe them at the bar of God. It is true, nothing can be more ſuperficial or abſurd than this pretence; but as ſinners are by divine authority pronounced fools, it is no wonder it hath ſome weight.

Other

Other particulars might be ſpecified under this head, but I now proceed to offer ſome arguments which may ſerve to diſſuade us againſt this imitation of popular and prevailing wickedneſs.

And here it ought to be conſidered, that piety and virtue are really honourable, and that profaneneſs and vice are really ſhameful, notwithſtanding the practice of the multitude. It is not neceſſary to ſupport this truth by a laboured demonſtration, ſince witneſs is borne to it by even the conſciences of the wicked themſelves. Even they, amid all the gaiety of profane ridicule, muſt inwardly acknowledge, if they do but deliberately reflect, that "the righteous is more "excellent than his neighbour." They may ſeem to think it ſtrange, and may ſpeak evil of us, becauſe we run not with them into the ſame exceſs of riot; and yet, whenever we comply, they ſecretly deſpiſe us; they condemn the levity which imitates their own conduct, they laugh at the folly which was ſeduced by their own arguments.

Suppoſe

Suppoſe that in the whole world there were but one wicked man. With what contempt and hatred would ſuch a ſingular offender be deſervedly regarded! But, will adding to the number of ſuch offenders alter the quality of his actions, or render them leſs worthy of hatred and contempt? Will the multitude of criminals render crimes innocent; or the harmony and conſent of thoughtleſs and infatuated men confound the eternal natures and differences of things, or repeal the divine will? On the other hand, were there only one virtuous and devout man among millions of profane and wicked, he would be truly worthy of eſteem and reverence, he would ſhine as a light in a dark place, and his conduct would be a living ſatire upon the general practice of the world.

Piety and virtue are regarded and eſteemed, not only by the wiſe and good among mankind, but by the bleſſed angels, who rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner, and by the wiſeſt and greateſt of all beings; who, on the contrary, hold wickedneſs in infinite

contempt and abhorrence. Let the thoughtleſs and giddy ſinner, who is apt to be infatuated by the example of the world, only for a moment reflect: Are not idleneſs, extravagance, ſenſuality, intemperance, profaneneſs, and other ſins, mean and baſe, diſingenuous and deformed; and is it really poſſible that the practice of multitudes, tho' ever ſo great, ſhould make them otherwiſe? Bare example, conſidered in itſelf, can never alter the nature of actions. If you plead in favour of your guilt, the example of wicked men, with equal propriety, nay, with greater authority, might you plead the example of wicked ſpirits, who are now ſuffering for their guilt; ſince they, by their original creation, were much greater and more important beings than the greateſt among the children of men. On the other hand, I would ſolemnly appeal to every man's heart, whether ſobriety and ſelf-government, integrity and benevolence, humility and devotion, patience and fortitude, with a faithful diſcharge of the duties of our ſeveral ſtations; —whether theſe form not a character truly venerable and praiſe-worthy, whatever the

inſolence of the multitude may ſay, or whatever their madneſs may practiſe? A wiſe and inſpired Apoſtle calls us to the practice of goodneſs, under the following characters; "Whatſoever things are true, whatſoever "things are juſt, whatſoever things are "venerable, whatſoever things are pure, "whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever "things are of good report." Are theſe the things of which we ought to be aſhamed? Are theſe the things which with a conſcious ſhyneſs we ought to conceal? Are theſe the things which for the ſake of the multitude we ought to abandon and betray? If ſo, let us never more pretend to reaſon and reflection, but mingle at once with our fellow brutes.

In one word, a life of piety is the life of angels; it is even complying with the will and imitating the conduct of God.

Again; ſingular goodneſs, in the midſt of ſurrounding ill examples, is peculiarly honourable, and intitled, by divine grace, to an uncommon reward. It is more laud-

able than ordinary to be faithful among the faithleſs, and when cloſely ſolicited by the various allurements of vice. It is certainly overcoming a very powerful temptation, and beſpeaks a temper which is fitted for the greater glory. Something of this kind ſeems to be intimated in the book of the Revelation; "Thou haſt a few names even in "Sardis, which have not defiled their gar- "ments; and they ſhall walk with me in "white, for they are worthy." If we have any of that ambition which becomes reaſonable creatures, and the profeſſed followers of our bleſſed Redeemer, we ſhall conſtantly endeavour, in imitation of his character, to be "holy, harmleſs, and undefiled, and "ſeparate from ſinners."

It is peculiarly ſhameful for thoſe who have been piouſly educated to be led by the example of an ignorant and unthinking world. When I look abroad into human life, and obſerve what little knowledge of religious duties there is in the greater part of mankind, I am quite aſtoniſhed that this ſhould be the caſe in the midſt of a Chriſ-

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tian country. And yet, when I conſider farther, that thoſe who profeſs any ſtrictneſs of religion do not always teach their children better, nay actually, in ſome caſes, ſet them the worſt of examples, my aſtoniſhment entirely ceaſes. I plainly ſee, for inſtance, that many perſons, even in this land of light, have no idea, nor ever had any notion given them, that the profanation of the ſabbath, eſpecially after the hours of public worſhip, is in the leaſt criminal; and they are greatly amazed when thoſe of a different education hint to them the contrary. Now, this powerful fence of regularity and religion being once thrown down, the way is manifeſtly open to the commiſſion of all other exceſſes. In the mean while, are theſe the perſons whoſe example ſhould be followed by thoſe who are better inſtructed? Is darkneſs to enlighten day? Is ignorance to impoſe upon knowledge? What infamy to human reaſon! Let it however be remembered, that thoſe who have learned better practices, and been accuſtomed to more laudable habits, can never ſin ſo cheaply as other men, but muſt ſuffer, for the ſame

individual crimes, a far more tremendous puniſhment. They having had the opportunity of knowing our Saviour's doctrine, and having uſually attended upon the inſtructions of his goſpel, muſt be chargeable, when offending in this preſumptuous manner, with "trampling under foot the bleſſed "Son of God."

However ſtrong the temptation to ſin ariſing from general corruption, we may always ſubdue it by that ſupernatural aſſiſtance which is ever at hand to ſupport us. "My grace is ſufficient for thee, for my "ſtrength is made perfect in weakneſs."

*Finally*; Whatever the world may ſay or practiſe, piety and virtue will render us happy, and profaneneſs and vice will make us miſerable both here and hereafter. The wrath of God is not only intimated by natural conſcience, but expreſsly "revealed "from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and "unrighteouſneſs of men." He hath ſolemnly declared that he will "render to "every man according to his deeds: To "them

" them who by patient continuance in well-
" doing ſeek for glory and honour and im-
" mortality, eternal life: But unto them
" that are contentious, and do not obey the
" truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs, indigna-
" tion and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh
" upon every ſoul of man that doeth evil."
This is the declaration of God. To whom ſhall we hearken? To Him or to his creatures? To Him, the wiſeſt and moſt perfect of all beings, who hath power to accompliſh both his promiſes and threatenings; or to the moſt abandoned of mankind, whoſe multitudes, even though enforced by the whole creation, could never ſcreen one ſoul from his final and righteous judgment?

In the mean while, we experience an anticipation of the future reckoning even in the preſent world; and find, by all manner of proofs, that vice is miſery, and virtue happineſs. Vice and profaneneſs deſtroy our health, our ſubſtance, our comfort and peace of mind; whereas virtue and devotion befriend us in all theſe reſpects, give us pleaſures infinitely ſuperior to thoſe of ſinful

indulgence, and would be every way eligible, even were there no hereafter. "The "ways of religious wiſdom are ways of "pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace." And yet every puniſhment of ſin, and reward of holineſs in the preſent ſtate, muſt fall infinitely ſhort of their conſequences in the future world. Be ſeriouſly aſſured, that you don't know what happineſs you forfeit, nor what miſery you incur, by taking the multitude for your guide; as the joys of heaven and the torments of hell are equally beyond your conceptions.

Let me now aſk,—and I aſk it in the name and by the authority of the eternal God;—whether the example of the world will be an alleviation either of the penalty or the loſs? If you are content to ſacrifice the comforts of goodneſs here, and to undergo, in the preſent ſtate, the inconvenience and remorſe of guilt; what will you ſay of hereafter? The time of ſickneſs, your laſt ſickneſs will come. Will it then, think you, be any relief to reflect, that you only ſinned with the multitude? You will ſee

the

the day when the trumpet will ſummon you before the tribunal of Chriſt. What will you then plead? That you were ſeduced by the general example of the world? Madneſs and inſolence! The anſwer—if ſuch abſurd impiety deſerve an anſwer—will be ready, and will give you eternal confuſion: "Did ye not know, were ye not frequently "and ſolemnly told, that the friendſhip of "the world was enmity with God? Ye "were charged not to be conformed to that "corrupt world, but to be transformed: "Ye were required to be blameleſs and "harmleſs, the ſons of God, in the midſt "of a crooked and perverſe generation, "among whom ye were expected to ſhine "as lights in the world." The conſequence will be dreadful beyond expreſſion. God grant, that every individual in this aſſembly may guard againſt it! "Depart, ye curſed, "into everlaſting fire, prepared for the "Devil and his angels."

Let me now again aſk; Will it cool the flames, or aſſuage the torments of that ſtate, to remember that the multitude miſled you, and

and that you offended only as the majority of mankind offended? If it is poſſible that you can ſeriouſly and deliberately think it, off with reſtraint, join the croud, ruſh on with the madneſs of gaiety in the path of the deſtroyer, and then plunge with unhappy millions into the gulph of eternal ruin.

SERMON

# SERMON VIII.

## ON THE NATURE, GUILT, AND DANGER OF CENSORIOUSNESS.

### PART I.

*MATTHEW* vii. 1, 2.

JUDGE NOT, THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED: FOR WITH WHAT JUDGMENT YE JUDGE, YE SHALL BE JUDGED; AND WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE, IT SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU AGAIN.

THE prohibition before us, which is part of our Saviour's divine Sermon upon the mount, is ſo reaſonable and uſeful, that, were it generally regarded, it would prevent many miſchiefs which now prevail, and render the earth much more ſimilar to heaven than it is. Nor indeed is it leſs neceſſary than uſeful; for the vice againſt which it would guard us, that of haſty and uncharitable judgment, ſeems to have infected greater numbers of mankind than any in the whole catalogue of ſins. The ſubject is manifeſtly of ſo great importance, that it deſerves to be very ſeriouſly attended

attended to; and at the ſame time ſo copious, that it affords no room for farther introduction.

I ſhall begin therefore with attempting to explain the nature of the judgment here prohibited; ſhall point out ſome of the principal occaſions, on which unlawful judgment is paſt; ſhew the reaſonableneſs of prohibiting ſuch a practice; and then illuſtrate and enforce the powerful conſideration, by which our Lord would reſtrain us from it.

With regard to the nature of unlawful judgment, the prohibition in the text certainly cannot intend that we are never to form any opinion of men's character and ſtate. To underſtand our Saviour's phraſe, "judge not," in this manner, would certainly be taking it in too literal and rigid a ſenſe. We find it ſometimes unavoidable to form an opinion, and even an unfavourable opinion of our fellow creatures; as for inſtance, when we obſerve many of their actions, or perhaps the main courſe of their lives, to be utterly indefenſible upon any imaginable

imaginable plea or pretence; and eſpecially when, together with the language of their conduct, we have their own expreſs teſtimony, boaſting of their vices and glorying in their ſhame. Charity does not require us to ſhut our eyes and renounce our reaſon; and we are ſo far from being required to confound the diſtinctions between duty and ſin, that thoſe perſons who call evil good, and good evil, have a ſolemn woe denounced againſt them in holy writ.

It is not only unavoidable, in many caſes, to judge men to be wicked and even to declare it; but it is alſo neceſſary in point of prudence and obligation, for our own ſafety, for the benefit of our friends, who may be in danger from fraud or violence, and for the public utility, when we give evidence in courts of juſtice. When we have certain proof that men are habitually intemperate, profane, lewd, unjuſt, cruel, or guilty of any other vice; not to believe it is impoſſible, and were it poſſible, would be highly abſurd.

It

It is manifeſt therefore that the crime here prohibited is haſty, raſh, and unmerciful judgment; either aſcribing faults to our fellow-creatures without proper evidence, or cruelly cenſuring them for thoſe imperfections which are common to human nature. It is a practice which betrays at leaſt a very great levity and wantonneſs of temper, together with a moſt deplorable want of charity or compaſſion, and ſometimes, from the degree in which it prevails, and the circumſtances with which it is attended, is a direct indication of a cruel and malignant diſpoſition. In a word, it proceeds either from a trifling head and an unfeeling heart,—"the brain of feathers, and "the heart of lead," as the poet expreſſes it—or elſe, from perſonal revenge, from particular envy, or from general malevolence. But from whatever cauſe it proceed, let it be arrived at the higheſt, or ſtop at the loweſt degree, it's conſequences may be ſometimes equally pernicious, it is highly diſhonourable to human nature, groſsly injurious to our fellow-creatures, and ſeverely condemned by the Saviour.

The

The external cauſes or occaſions of unlawful judgment, are, firſt, unfavourable appearances in the conduct of mankind, which raiſe a ſuſpicion, but amount not to a proof of guilt. For example; perſons may ſeem to be avaritious, and be rigourouſly charged with avarice, when their parſimony ariſes from circumſtances, which prudence obliges them to conceal, or from private beneficence, which modeſty forbids them to diſcover. In all caſes of this nature, unleſs the evidence be clear and explicit, we ought not to condemn; for indeed ſometimes the truth will glare upon our eyes and force conviction. But ſhould we at times happen to be moderate and favourable in our judgment, it is certainly much better, both for our own ſalvation and the peace of the world, that we err on the charitable than the cenſorious ſide.

Again; we may charge men with injuſtice merely from partial views, for want of hearing their own defence, and examining both ſides of the queſtion; when a cloſer attention to all the circumſtances of the caſe might

might convince us we have been raſh and precipitate, and ſhew us the conduct of thoſe we condemn, in the faireſt point of light.

In ſhort, though iniquity abounds in the world, there is not a ſingle vice which has not, in ſome inſtance or other, been wrongfully imputed, either to perſons in private, or to thoſe in public life; the latter of whom eſpecially, were they almoſt equal to angels, would be ſure to have their ſlighteſt imprudences magnified into atrocious crimes, and their moſt beneficial actions rewarded with the moſt virulent calumnies.

To aſcend to a much higher caſe; even the Son of God himſelf, while upon earth, though his words and his actions bore not the leaſt reſemblance to guilt or imperfection, except in the eyes of the ignorant and prejudiced, yet partook of the common lot, had almoſt his whole behaviour miſconſtrued, and was defamed in the moſt cruel manner.

An

An habitual cheerfulneſs alſo of temper and behaviour has been condemned not only as levity, but as the mark of an unſanctified heart. The rigorous and auſtere will cenſure every thing that is different from their own diſpoſition. With perſons of this turn the moſt innocent pleaſantry ſhews want of grace, an open countenance is a token of inſincerity, and a ſmile a mark of reprobation. They think hardly of the ſpiritual ſtate of thoſe around them, merely from their cheerfulneſs, though none have ſo much reaſon to be cheerful as the truly good; though this temper has a peculiar tendency to adorn and recommend religion; and though our Lord has expreſsly forbidden us to diſfigure our faces, in order to make an oſtentation of our piety.

Sometimes a melancholy temper and carriage have met with a conſtruction equally ſevere and unfair. They have been charged as indications of ill-nature, of religious hypocriſy, or of dark deſigns; when it has been eaſy to diſcern, or at leaſt, on careful inſpection, would have appeared probable,

that they have been very harmleſs, and either ſprung from conſtitution, from bodily diſorders, of which fortitude would not complain, or from mental uneaſineſs which prudence would not divulge. "The heart, "ſays Solomon, knoweth it's own bitter-"neſs, and a ſtranger intermeddleth not "with it's joy." We ſhould do juſtice to perſons of every feature and every temper, as they have undoubtedly a claim to certain rights from their fellow creatures; for otherwiſe a man might be put to death for a look, and have torments inflicted on him for being guilty of an unpromiſing aſpect. The oppoſite and inconſiſtent reproaches thrown on theſe oppoſite tempers, in our Lord's own caſe, who was ſocial and cheerful, and in that of John the Baptiſt, who was more auſtere in his manners, have been admirably expoſed by that beſt of teachers, who compares them to the play of humourſome children, pleaſed with repreſentations neither of mourning nor feſtivity: "And "the Lord ſaid, Whereunto then ſhall I "liken the men of this generation, and "to what are they like? They are like

"unto

" unto children ſitting in the market-place " and calling one to another, and ſaying, " We have piped unto you, and ye have " not danced; we have mourned unto you, " and ye have not wept. For John the " Baptiſt came neither eating bread nor " drinking wine; and ye ſay, he hath a " devil;"—that is, he is poſſeſſed, and melancholy mad,—" The ſon of man is " come eating and drinking, and ye ſay, " Behold, a gluttonous man, and a wine- " bibber, a friend of publicans and ſinners. " But wiſdom is juſtified of all her chil- " dren." Thoſe who are truly her children, however different their natural diſpoſitions, and however variouſly they adapt their carriage to the various circumſtances in which they act, and the various characters they are called to ſuſtain, will finally juſtify her maxims, or demonſtrate their utility and excellence.

Afflictions, and eſpecially great calamities, have often been accounted indications of extraordinary guilt. This was the miſtake of Job's miſerable comforters, who,

though otherwiſe prudent and good men, added by their ſuſpicions and cenſures to the ſorrows of their diſtreſſed friend. But tho' God in that caſe condeſcended to rectify the miſtake, multitudes in following ages have not been the leaſt wiſer for the divine inſtruction, but have made thoſe events, which ought to have raiſed compaſſion, the very means of gratifying their ſpleen. Our Saviour found it ſo in his days, and repeated the reproof which had been given to the folly of Job's friends: "There were preſent at that ſeaſon ſome that told him of "the Galileans, whoſe blood Pilate had "mingled with their ſacrifices. And Jeſus "anſwering, ſaid unto them, Suppoſe ye "that theſe Galileans were ſinners above all "the reſt of the Galileans, becauſe they "ſuffered ſuch things? I tell you, nay: "But except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe "periſh. Or thoſe eighteen upon whom "the tower in Siloam fell, and ſlew them; "think ye that they were ſinners above all "men that dwelt in Jeruſalem? I tell you, "nay: But except ye repent, ye ſhall all "likewiſe periſh."

There

There is no doubt but miſery was firſt introduced, and a great part of it is ſtill continued by ſin; but if we inſtantly conclude that every great affliction implies the ſufferer to be a worſe ſinner than his neighbours, we aſſume to be privy-counſellors of heaven, contradicting alſo the heavenly volume, which aſſures us, that "all things "come alike to all," and that good perſons ſuffer troubles as fatherly corrections. We argue in that caſe like thoſe other barbarians, who, becauſe a viper faſtened on St. Paul's hand, thought him a murderer, and were convinced of the contrary by nothing leſs than a miracle. They were juſt as wiſe in this ſentence, as they were afterwards in judging him to be a God; or as we ſhould be in concluding all thoſe to be ſaints, who happen to be very proſperous.

Another cauſe of raſh judgment is an oppoſition of intereſts; for people are ready to conclude that whoever interferes with them, though ever ſo caſually or innocently, muſt needs be a bad man, ſo that all his words and actions, right or wrong, muſt

be placed in the moſt invidious light. Their own cauſe is always the moſt righteous, as well as their ſayings the wiſeſt, and their deeds the beſt; and merit is all their own.

Another occaſion of haſty and cenſorious judgment is oppoſition of ſentiments. The baſe, undermining arts, the vile ſlanders, and the unchriſtian rigorous treatment, which have ſprung from this ſource, are ſo ſhocking, that it would give me the utmoſt pain to deſcribe them, and you to hear them deſcribed. Would God they could be eternally forgotten! I ſhall only obſerve here, that we are all in a ſtate of infirmity with regard to the acquiſition of truth, as well as of knowledge; that the moſt diligent inquirers are moſt ſenſible of the difficulties of inquiry, while the lazy and implicit believer has no notion of difficulty; that the ſincere can never be in danger, though they ſhould prove miſtaken; that others differ not from us more than we differ from them; that we, however confident, may in fact be the perſons miſtaken; that our opinions are not altogether in our own power;

power; that no man's ſpeculative notions can be a real injury to his neighbour, except indeed as a little affront to his infallibility; that we ought to judge of men more by their actions than their opinions; that men ſometimes appear to be truly good even in ſpite of opinions that ſeem unfavourable to goodneſs, and much more with opinions that cannot in their nature have a hurtful tendency; and finally, that the terms of ſalvation are already eſtabliſhed in ſcripture, and are not left to be either made or multiplied by weak mortals. The particulars I have juſt mentioned would admit of very great enlargement, but I have here thrown them together in a heap, which, I truſt, will ſerve as a kind of bulwark againſt the encroachments of unchriſtian zeal.

But now, whence the bitter and uncharitable cenſures which have been paſt, on account of different ſentiments; and whence, in particular, the malignity, which merely on the ſame account has followed men beyond the grave, and uttered ſuch language as this? "I would not be where that man

" man is gone for ten thouſand worlds."—Dreadful!—Chriſtianity! whither art thou fled?

Were I not afraid of tiring your patience with particulars, I would mention two more under this diviſion of the ſubject. I have obſerved already, that men too haſtily cenſure their fellow-creatures becauſe of unfavourable appearances in their conduct, and likewiſe becauſe of the afflictions which they ſuffer. Will you now be ſurpriſed, if I farther obſerve, that they think evil of them for the very contrary reaſons, for eminence either in goodneſs or proſperity? Be ſurpriſed at nothing; for it is manifeſt that there is nothing which malevolence cannot turn into matter of detraction; juſt as the ſerpent converts the beſt of his food into poiſon. Eminent proſperity is an occaſion of envy, and therefore the poſſeſſor will generally be railed at by the fooliſh and the prodigal; and ſo likewiſe is eminent goodneſs, for the Apoſtle hath told you, that the licentious will " ſpeak evil of you, if you " run not with them into the ſame exceſs of " riot."

"riot." But enough under this general diviſion of the ſubject.

The reaſonableneſs of prohibiting this practice I ſhall finiſh more expeditiouſly, reſerving the remainder of the ſubject to a future ſervice.

The prohibition is reaſonable, becauſe the practice it condemns, or haſty cenſure, is a ſpecies of injuſtice and cruelty. If a good name is better than precious ointment, (a conſiderable article among the riches of the ancient world) to rob perſons raſhly of their good name, before we are certain that it is juſtly forfeited, is the moſt malicious of all robbery. People imagine, that if they meddle not with the lives or property of others, they are perfectly free from injuſtice. A moſt ſhocking miſtake! There are many who value their reputation, not only more than their property, but unſpeakably more than their lives. I have known the man, a perſon of diſtinguiſhed rank and diſtinguiſhed merit, whoſe life was viſibly ſhortened by a public reproach,

and

and a conſequent brand of infamy. For though he was conſcious of his own integrity, though his character was ſpeedily and abundantly cleared, yet his ſenſibility was ſo exquiſitely fine, that the wound could never be healed. Little do we know what we are doing, when we either wantonly or maliciouſly ſport with the reputation of our fellow-creatures.

We ourſelves have many infirmities and faults, are liable, like others, to a miſrepreſentation of our conduct, and have need of candour and compaſſion. We dread ſuch treatment from our fellow-creatures as we often give them; and how terrible would be our caſe, if a Being of infinite perfection were rigorouſly to mark our faults! Beſides, our own faults and prejudices not only render us unjuſt, but very incompetent judges. It is our Saviour's language in the context; "Why beholdeſt thou the mote—or rather "the ſplinter—that is in thy brother's eye, "but conſidereſt not the beam that is in "thine own eye?"—Thou thyſelf mayeſt be, and probably art, more blameable than he.

"Or

"Or how wilt thou ſay to thy brother, let "me pull out the ſplinter out of thine eye, "and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? "Thou hypocrite, firſt caſt out the beam "out of thine own eye, and then ſhalt thou "ſee clearly to caſt out the ſplinter out of "thy brother's eye." Let us take an accurate review of our own conduct, and then we ſhall diſcover ſuch follies and ſins as will render us abundantly more moderate in our cenſures of other men.

Rigorous judgments are always followed by reproachful words, and generally by ill actions. We are irritated for the moſt part by our own prejudices, and no one can determine where the miſchief will end.

Cenſorioufneſs likewiſe becomes mutual, and occaſions the moſt violent contention. The miſeries and ſins that have ſometimes been produced by a ſingle calumny, are not to be deſcribed. It has been, it may be again, it muſt be, in ſome meaſure, a ſource of everlaſting evil.

*Laſtly;*

*Laſtly*; A cenſorious temper has a natural tendency to diſqualify us for future happineſs. I have too good an opinion of your underſtandings, to imagine you want this to be proved.

But the ſubject grows upon me beyond bounds. Would God that in practice it were brought to a happy concluſion!

SERMON

# SERMON IX.

## ON THE NATURE, GUILT, AND DANGER OF CENSORIOUSNESS.

### PART II.

*MATTHEW* vii. 1, 2.

JUDGE NOT, THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED: FOR WITH WHAT JUDGMENT YE JUDGE, YE SHALL BE JUDGED; AND WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE, IT SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU AGAIN.

AS there is no vice which more generally prevails than haſty and cenſorious judging, ſo there is none more lightly eſteemed by thoſe who are guilty of it, or practiſed with leſs ſelf-accuſation. I ſay by thoſe who are guilty of it; for when it comes to a perſon's own turn to be the ſubject of uncharitable cenſure, he always looks upon it as a moſt crying ſin, and worthy of ſevere vengeance from God and man. But the offenders, in the mean while, they who have the leaſt compaſſion for the characters of their neighbours, are generally, in this

and

and all other reſpects, the moſt favourable and tender to their own. Such perſons ought to conſider, that although cenſoriouſneſs may, in their opinion, be a trifling fault, or no fault at all; it is far otherwiſe in the judgment of God, who, according to the text, will puniſh thoſe who indulge it with peculiar rigour for this and for all other ſins.

In the former diſcourſe on this ſubject, I propoſed, *firſt*, to explain the nature of the judgment here prohibited; *ſecondly*, to point out ſome principal occaſions on which it is practiſed; *thirdly*, to ſhew the reaſonableneſs of the prohibition; and *fourthly*, to enforce that powerful conſideration in the text, by which our Lord would reſtrain us from this ſinful practice.

The crime prohibited was ſhewn to be haſty, raſh, and unmerciful judgment; ariſing either from levity or malevolence, and either aſcribing faults to our fellow-creatures without proper evidence, or condemning them without mercy for thoſe imperfections which

which are common to human nature. The principal occaſions on which unlawful judgment is paſt, were ſaid to be ſuch as theſe: Unfavorable appearances, which are not always certain proofs; an habitual cheerfulneſs of temper and behaviour; a diſpoſition extremely grave and dejected; afflictions, and eſpecially great calamities; an oppoſition of ſentiments; eminent proſperity, or eminent goodneſs.

It was ſhewn under the third general head, that the prohibition is reaſonable, becauſe the practice it condemns is a kind, and one of the worſt kinds, of injuſtice and cruelty; becauſe we, like others, are liable to miſrepreſentation, and have real need of candour in our turns; becauſe rigorous judgments are always followed by reproachful words, and generally by ill actions; becauſe cenſoſorioufneſs, for the moſt part, becomes mutual, and occaſions endleſs and moſt violent contentions; and finally, becauſe a cenſorious temper has a natural tendency to diſqualify our ſouls for heaven.

Let

Let us now proceed to the laſt general head, namely, the powerful conſideration in the text, by which our Lord would reſtrain us from this wicked and pernicious practice. "Judge not, that ye be not judged; "for with what judgment ye judge, ye ſhall "be judged; and with what meaſure ye "mete, it ſhall be meaſured to you again." All the reaſons I have alledged for the prohibition, are indeed reaſons againſt the commiſſion of the ſin; but the rigorous ſentence which the cenſorious muſt expect from the ſupreme judge, may be regarded as the moſt powerful reſtraint. If we ſeverely judge others, we ſhall be ſeverely judged ourſelves at the ſupreme tribunal. The judgment here threatened in return is not that of men, although, as hath been already obſerved, that will generally follow. To be cenſured of men will ſometimes be our portion, even though we ſhould not be guilty of ſuch a conduct ourſelves. It was the lot even of our Saviour himſelf, who was perfect goodneſs, in whoſe mouth there was no guile, and who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. On other occaſions, good perſons, whom

whom we have unjuſtly and cruelly cenſured, may, like our Saviour, be more generous than to make us a ſimilar return. Beſides, the judgment of men is comparatively of little conſequence, and when it happens to be undeſerved, may be juſtly deſpiſed; and will generally be deſpiſed by the wiſe and good, as it was particularly by the Apoſtle of the Gentiles. But God's ſentence will be ſuch as the cenſorious cannot poſſibly eſcape, nor can help feeling in the moſt dreadful manner.

When it is intimated that God will judge us if we judge our fellow-creatures, it is not meant that his deciſion concerning us will be unjuſt, as our's concerning others frequently are; but that he will ſentence without ſhewing us any of that mercy which we refuſe to mankind. Of this truth we are ſufficiently forewarned by St. James: "So ſpeak ye, and ſo do, as they that ſhall "be judged by the law of liberty. For he "ſhall have judgment without mercy, that "hath ſhewed no mercy." How dreadful a ſituation! To have no compaſſion to

expect from that Being, who is the fountain of all compaſſion.

Let us only conſider what our caſe would be, were God to treat us as we frequently treat one another. Let the beſt of mere men that ever lived reflect, not only with what a multitude of follies, but with what a multitude of ſins he is chargeable; and what would be the conſequence, were God ſtrict to mark his iniquities, to take rigorous notice of every individual fault, even in ſpite of his repentance, and to make no abatement for the unavoidable infirmities of his nature. But thoſe who habitually indulge cenſoriouſneſs, ought to remember, that they are wicked in many other reſpects, and cannot be ſuppoſed to have exerciſed true repentance; for otherwiſe they would not have been ſtill ſubject to ſo deteſtable a habit. Is it for them to be unmerciful towards their fellow ſinners, or perhaps towards perſons much better than themſelves? The Supreme Being hath no imperfection of which to be conſcious; and therefore, if he ſhould judge with ſeverity,

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it would be no more than he hath a right to do, and what his conſummate rectitude, as well as almighty power, would authorize. But if thoſe, who are ſo guilty themſelves, have neither candour nor compaſſion towards men like themſelves, or perhaps more innocent by many degrees; what mercy can they expect from the perfect decider of their future lot?

Charity, love, or benevolence, is repreſented as ſo eſſential to the Chriſtian character, that ſupernatural gifts, even like thoſe of angels, that the moſt liberal alms-giving which can poſſibly be practiſed, and martyrdom itſelf, without it, are repreſented as nothing. He therefore who is habitually and groſsly guilty of cenſorioufneſs and raſh judgment, being deſtitute of charity, cannot be a good Chriſtian: For it is ſaid, among other characteriſtics of this charity, that "it thinketh no evil,"—that is, any farther than it is unavoidable,—that "it "rejoiceth not in iniquity,"—does not take pleaſure in finding matter for cavil and reproach,—"but rejoiceth in the truth,"—is highly delighted with every inſtance in

which it ſees wiſdom and goodneſs prevail;—"believeth all things, hopeth all "things,"—is ready to believe the beſt which the circumſtances of the caſe will allow, and to put on every action and every appearance the faireſt conſtruction that the nature of it will bear.

What will be the conſequence of falling under the ſevere ſentence of the judge in the laſt day, no language nor conception of our's can ſufficiently repreſent; and for that very reaſon, the thought of it ſhould more powerfully deter us from uncharitable cenſure. It ought to withhold us from injuriouſly ſporting with the characters of our fellow-creatures; for if we come at length to be condemned ourſelves, we ſhall find that it is not a matter of ſport, but the moſt ſolemn and ſerious affair in which we were ever concerned. And in order that this doom may make upon us the greater impreſſion beforehand, and that we may happily avoid it, we ſhould conſider what our thoughts of ſuch a conduct will be in our laſt agonies, whether it will yield us any refreſhment

refreſhment on a death bed, and eſpecially, how the conſciouſneſs of it will affect us when our own characters are about to be ſcrutinized by unerring wiſdom. A ſenſe of our own folly, imperfection, and guilt, would be ſufficient, if duly regarded, to preſerve our minds from conceiving and our mouths from uttering an uncharitable and malignant cenſure; but the judgments of God ſhould be ſtill more efficacious for this purpoſe, and fill us with horror at the very approaches of ſuch a vice. "I am "about to judge unfavourably, raſhly, and "beyond evidence of my fellow-creature's "character; to condemn him without mercy "for his real or imaginary faults, and in all "the preſumption of ſelf-importance and "malevolence, to pronounce upon his ſpiri-"tual ſtate. But have I no foibles, no "imperfections, no ſins of my own to be "cenſured, with which others might make "free in their turn, and on which I might "profitably direct my own animadverſions? "Do not I, as well as others, belong to the "common maſs of human nature, which all "the ſons of Adam have too much contri-

" buted to pollute? In what manner am I
" affected, when I find myſelf cenſured and
" inhumanly reproached? Does it not give
" me exquiſite uneaſineſs, and for a time,
" at leaſt, embitter the comforts of my life?
" Am I not deſirous of the approbation of
" mankind, and do I not judge that I have
" a right to have my words and actions as
" candidly and kindly interpreted as reaſon
" will admit? But others ſurely have the
" ſame pretenſions and the ſame feelings as
" I have; and why therefore do I not put
" myſelf in their place; why do I beſtow
" a treatment which I could not bear to
" receive?

" But if the rule of equity has no influ-
" ence on my heart, if I am altogether
" inſenſible to the gentle energy of com-
" paſſion, ſurely, the threatening of the
" great Redeemer ſhould ſtrike me with
" efficacious terror. Is the meaſure by
" which I deal out to others, the very mea-
" ſure by which I ſhould chooſe to receive
" in the laſt day? Inſupportable thought!
" It is a ſtandard which I dare not approach.

" I cannot

" I cannot ſtand under the reflection that I " myſelf ſhould finally meet with the ſeve- " rity, which I have too frequently ſhewn " to others. 'Till therefore I am infallible " and ſinleſs myſelf, I am determined, in " ſpite of oppoſite ſentiments, oppoſite in- " tereſts, or unfavourable appearances, to " judge, to ſpeak, and to behave with the " utmoſt candour; cultivating in my heart, " and adorning my life with that charity, " without which my Chriſtian profeſſion is " only a name, and a name by which I " muſt be daily reproached. Upon ſelf- " inſpection I am certain of my own follies " and ſins, and here therefore will I give " vent to all my ſeverity and ſpite; but I " am far from being certain of thoſe follies " and vices which I ſometimes aſcribe to " my fellow-creatures: For which reaſon " I will cheriſh compaſſion, and dread the " divine judgment."

There is one circumſtance which adds impiety and ſacrilege to malignity, in the cenſures we paſs, particularly on our fellow Chriſtians, on account of uneſſential dif-

ferences; and that is their being the ſervants of God, who alone can judge the heart, who alone can decide on the terms of ſalvation, and muſt peculiarly reſent our invaſion of his prerogative, and condemnations of his houſhold over whom we have no authority. "Let not him that eateth,"—that is, indiſcriminately of all kinds of food,—"deſpiſe "him that eateth not; and let not him "which eateth not, judge him that eateth; "For God hath received him. Who art "thou that judgeſt another man's ſervant?" —or rather, the ſervant of another; for God's ſervant is here intended.—"To his "own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth: yea, "he ſhall be holden up; for God is able "to make him ſtand." Thus likewiſe St. James nearly to the ſame purpoſe: "There "is one lawgiver, who is able to ſave and "to deſtroy: Who art thou that judgeſt "another?" I conclude this diviſion of the ſubject with part of a parable delivered by our Lord; from whence we learn (there indeed in the caſe of forgiving or not forgiving; but the ſentiment is equally applicable to the purpoſe of our ſubject) that the

the very treatment which we give others we ſhall receive ourſelves from God. "O "thou wicked ſervant, I forgave thee all "that debt, becauſe thou deſiredſt me: "Shouldeſt not thou alſo have had com-"paſſion on thy fellow-ſervant, even as I "had pity on thee? And his Lord was "wrath, and delivered him to the tormen-"tors, 'till he ſhould pay all that was due "unto him. So likewiſe ſhall my heavenly "Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your "hearts forgive not every one his brother "their treſpaſſes." Now if God will treat us with ſeverity for not pardoning debts and injuries, when the diſtreſs of the objects called for ſuch compaſſion; how much more will he wreak upon us an exemplary judgment, when we are the injuring parties ourſelves; when we have injured mankind in ſo tender a part as their character, which is dearer than either property or life!

If all theſe things are true, let us examine ourſelves, how far we have been guilty of this crime; let us carefully avoid it for the future; and for that purpoſe, let us

duly

duly conſider the threatening in the text, with the other arguments that may reſtrain ſo wretched a habit. I have hinted it before, but it can never be too often hinted: It would be uſeful frequently to aſk ourſelves, in what manner we ſhall wiſh, when we appear before Chriſt's tribunal, that we had treated our fellow-creatures and fellow Chriſtians.

As the laſt judgment is to ſet every thing right, let us learn to deſpiſe the temporary and unmerited cenſures of men. It is indeed unqueſtionable that a good name is better than precious ointment; but let us be more ſolicitous to deſerve than acquire it, and put our happineſs as little as poſſible in the power of other men. Very frail is that ſtructure of felicity, which the firſt man that pleaſes can throw down with his breath! How little Saint Paul built his happineſs upon the opinions of others will appear from his own words: "With me "it is a very ſmall thing that I ſhould be "judged of you or of man's judgment."

Let

Let us in the mean time endeavour, as far as we can, to prevent the wrong judgments of others concerning us, by avoiding the appearance of evil. Though calumny and detraction may poſſibly be deſpiſed by fortitude, yet they are far from being agreeable; and what is much worſe, they have an unhappy tendency to prevent our uſefulneſs in the world. Notwithſtanding therefore, it be impracticable to ſhun evil report in every reſpect, we may render our conduct, in many inſtances, leſs ambiguous than it is, and "put to ſilence the igno-"rance of fooliſh men." The Apoſtles have thought it not unworthy of their care to recommend to us the maintaining of a good reputation, for the ſake of our Chriſtian profeſſion; that we "walk honeſt-"ly," or as the original ſignifies, creditably, "toward thoſe who are without;" and "whatſoever things are of good report, "if there be any virtue, and if there be any "praiſe, that we think of theſe things."

Let us always remember how amiable men are rendered by a candid temper and behaviour.

behaviour. When we know, hear, or read of perſons who are poſſeſſed of this excellent diſpoſition, we love and admire them by a kind of natural inſtinct: Nay, we love and admire them, though in other reſpects they ſhould be attended with many imperfections. We are naturally prejudiced in favour of every thing they ſay or do. The very appearance of candour is deſirable, were it only for the ſake of policy and general influence; but if we regard inward pleaſure and ſatisfaction, we muſt attain the reality. Why is it that the habit which we call good-breeding is ſo agreeable and recommending to all mankind? For no other reaſon but becauſe it is the ſhadow or reſemblance of candour and benignity. But if the ſhadow is ſo pleaſing, how univerſally attractive muſt be the ſubſtance?

To conclude all in one word; next to the love of God, there is nothing that renders us more uſeful, amiable, and happy here; nor is there any thing which more attempers us for complete happineſs hereafter, than a candid and benevolent ſpirit.

SERMON

# SERMON X.

## ON THE AMIABLENESS OF CHILDHOOD.

*LUKE* xviii. 16.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME, AND FORBID THEM NOT; FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

I Cannot help ſoothing myſelf with the reflection, that if mourning parents had been witneſſes of the ſcene between Chriſt and theſe little—diſciples, ſhall I call them, —it muſt have wholly reconciled them to the ſhort afflictions of the dear innocents, or even to the loſs of them during that tender age. To have ſuch a compenſation for their momentary ſufferings as the kind regards of the Son of God! To have him for their friend and patron, and the aſſertor of their high privileges! What can they fear themſelves, if capable of reflection, or what can their parents fear for them, with reſpect either to time or eternity?

We

We are informed in the verſes preceding the text, that certain parents or other friends, judging that the very touch of ſo holy a perſon might convey ſome bleſſing—for theſe little ones are not ſaid to have been diſeaſed—brought infants, or, according to St. Mark, little children, to be touched by the Redeemer. But the diſciples, ſtill too much influenced by a worldly ſpirit, thought it below their Maſter's dignity to be troubled with children, and rebuked thoſe who introduced them. On the contrary, their bleſſed Maſter himſelf called the children to him, and ſaid, "Suffer "little children to come unto me, and for-"bid them not, for of ſuch is the kingdom "of God." The other Evangeliſt, in the parallel place, relates, that when Jeſus ſaw the behaviour of the diſciples, "he was "much diſpleaſed." Nay, in the verſe after the text, he at once mortifies and inſtructs them, by declaring, that unleſs they, and others, bore in ſome reſpects a greater reſemblance to children, they muſt not flatter themſelves with hopes of the divine favour. "Verily, I ſay unto you,"—his uſual

uſual introduction when he meant to ſpeak emphatically,—"whoſoever ſhall not re-"ceive the kingdom of God as a little "child, ſhall in no wiſe enter therein."

Two propoſitions manifeſtly reſult from this text: That our gracious Lord hath a very tender affection for children; and that children, with thoſe only who reſemble them in their amiable diſpoſitions, are intitled to the privileges of God's kingdom.

No words of ours can repreſent our Lord's affection for children, nor any arguments prove it, like his own language and deportment in the ſcene before us. His reſentment of the prohibition given by his diſciples; his command for the introduction of theſe little beings to him; his condeſcending praiſe of their native ſimplicity, and what St. Mark relates, his taking them up in his arms, putting his hands upon them, and bleſſing them: Theſe are ſuch demonſtrations of his tenderneſs for theſe little engaging objects, as no ſuſpicion can withſtand.

But

But why do I talk of ſuſpicion? Why do I ſpeak of theſe demonſtrations? Did not the bleſſed and all-benevolent Son of God come down from heaven, chooſe to be the child of poverty and the heir of wretchedneſs, on purpoſe to deliver the whole race from the inconveniences of Adam's guilt, and all the moral agents who repent, from the puniſhment of their own? Did he pray for the youngeſt of the ſpecies here upon earth, that his Father would preſerve them, and guide them, render them good, and make them happy; and do we imagine his kindneſs diminiſhed in heaven,—there, in the very ſeat of all perfection, and with God, the fountain of all good? Surely ſo very far otherwiſe, that the favour he ſhewed them upon earth, could be nothing to what he will grant them in the ſtate of repoſe and glory.

We are here likewiſe taught, that children, with thoſe only who reſemble them in their amiable diſpoſitions, are intitled to the privileges of God's kingdom. "Verily "I ſay unto you, whoſoever ſhall not receive "the

"the kingdom of God as a little child," —or with the humble ſpirit and docile temper of a little child,—"he ſhall not enter "therein." "Of *ſuch* is the kingdom of "heaven." That thoſe who in temper reſemble little children are here included is manifeſt; but ſtrange indeed would it be, if little children themſelves ſhould be excluded, when it is their very reſemblance which recommends others to favour! Some perhaps may imagine that children, at leaſt very young children, are incapable of being ſaved, or being raiſed to eternal life and happineſs, becauſe they are incapable of faith. It is affirmed, we are told, in ſcripture, that "he who believeth not"—practically believeth not—"is condemned "already." But ſurely no equity, not to ſay compaſſion, will admit that faith is neceſſary to the ſalvation of any one who hath neither ability nor means to entertain it. The ſcripture affirms, that "if any will "not work, neither ſhould he eat." But will it from thence follow that infants ought to be ſtarved? And ſhall we imagine that infants, innocent, unoffending hapleſs in-

ſants, are alone to be deprived of the happy effects of Chriſt's mediation, and conſigned over without remedy to utter annihilation? O thou original, paternal, and ſupreme goodneſs, who haſt ſent thy Son as the expreſs image of thy perſon; forgive the infirmities of thy creatures, who, through the miſt of prejudice, fear, and other paſſions, diſcern not the glories of thy benevolence.

When it is ſaid that of ſuch, that is, of children and thoſe who reſemble them, is the kingdom of God; the principal idea conveyed to us is that of heaven, or God's kingdom of glory; for our Lord affirms, that "whoſoever ſhall not receive this king-"dom as a little child,"—that is, the laws of it with the meek diſpoſition of a little child,—"he ſhall not enter therein." But we are certain that too many actually enter into the Chriſtian church, or among the apparent ſubjects of the kingdom of grace, who are totally devoid of this diſpoſition, and labour under the contrary habits. If, however, the kingdom of grace be here alſo included, the meaning is, that ſuch unhappy

happy perſons ſhall not only be excluded heaven, but are merely nominal, and very unworthy members of the church upon earth.

But now let us ſee what are the principal of thoſe diſpoſitions in children, of which God and the Redeemer condeſcend to approve, and which adults muſt imitate, in order to be acceptable ſubjects of the divine Sovereign. Of theſe let us take our account, not from our own conjectures, but from the oracles of divine truth. At preſent I ſhall ſpecify only the three following: Humility, as oppoſed to pride and ambition; docility, or readineſs to receive inſtructions; benignity and a forgiving temper, in oppoſition to malice and revenge.

It may be here neceſſary to premiſe, that theſe diſpoſitions are not equally prevalent in all children; that even in the beſt they are only comparatively prevalent; that is, they are much ſtronger in them than in moſt adult perſons, who are corrupted by habit and example; and that children themſelves,

having received from their predeceſſors ſome conſtitutional taint, or irregular bias, have need of renewing grace; which, I doubt not, thoſe who die before they are complete moral agents, actually receive. Nay, probably, their early departure from a corrupt body may, together with the influence of that grace, greatly contribute to fit them for a ſtate of perfect goodneſs and felicity. Any native irregularity in their paſſions, any original bias unfavourable to piety and virtue, will be conſidered as their misfortune and not their fault; and when they become moral agents, is doubtleſs allowed for as part of their trial. It was, probably, with a reference to this native imperfection, derived from their firſt and ſucceeding parents, that the ſacred writer cries out, "Who can "bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Mean while, it is certainly true, that children are extremely pure and untainted, in compariſon with thoſe in a mature and adult ſtate. Let us conſider, therefore, the diſpoſitions of children, which prepare them for heaven, and are repreſented as exemplary to thoſe of riper years.

The

The firſt is humility, as oppoſed both to pride and ambition. As oppoſed to pride, this temper muſt be very conducive to the ſincere profeſſion of Chriſtianity. In the primitive times Chriſt was rejected, becauſe he came out of Galilee, becauſe he was the carpenter's reputed ſon, becauſe he was poor and afflicted, becauſe the rulers did not believe in him, and at laſt, becauſe he died upon a croſs. A circumſtance this, moſt humiliating to human pride! What! depend for everlaſting felicity and glory on a crucified malefactor and ſlave! Thus too, in the preſent age, many reject the goſpel, becauſe they pride themſelves in their own knowledge, deem Chriſtianity altogether needleſs, and think themſelves too wiſe to be inſtructed by the poor man of Nazareth.

Children, on the other ſide, are free from this ſelf conceit; they have no notion of rejecting a Saviour becauſe he is poor and afflicted, and, ſo far as their underſtanding reaches, will receive benefits from the moſt wretched man upon earth.

This child-like humility is oppoſed alſo to criminal ambition, or an exceſſive thirſt after power and greatneſs; a diſpoſition, which, though you may behold the ſeeds of it more or leſs in children, yet is grown much larger, and ranker, and more deſtructive, in many of maturer years. In a paſſage very ſimilar to the text and context, our Lord recommends the pattern of a meek and contented child, with the expreſs deſign of mortifying the aſpiring temper of the diſciples: "The diſciples came unto Jeſus, "ſaying, Who is the greateſt in the king-"dom of heaven? And Jeſus called a little "child unto him, and ſet him in the midſt "of them, and ſaid, Verily I ſay unto you, "except ye be converted, ye ſhall not enter "into the kingdom of heaven. Whoſoever "therefore ſhall humble himſelf as this "little child, the ſame is greateſt in the "kingdom of heaven." It is both needleſs and improper to ſhew, at preſent, what miſchiefs ambition hath always wrought and is now working in the world. Let us rather turn to a more pleaſing object, and attend to the account given by the Pſalmiſt of the oppoſite

oppoſite temper; an account the more to be relied on, as addreſſed immediately to God. "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine "eyes lofty; neither do I exerciſe myſelf "in great matters, or in things too high "for me. Surely I have behaved and "quieted myſelf as a child that is weaned "of his mother: My ſoul is even as a "weaned child." Humility is not only neceſſary with reference to ſo ſinful and wretched a creature as man, but when duly conſidered, extremely amiable in itſelf, and altogether conſiſtent with true ſpirit and fortitude. Every man bears witneſs to the excellence of humility, who endeavours, though unſucceſsfully, to conceal his pride.

Docility, or a willingneſs to be taught, is another excellent diſpoſition of children, very neceſſary in the concerns both of time and eternity, and which ought to be cheriſhed much more than it is by thoſe who are adult. An exceſſive eſteem of ourſelves is a great enemy to the intereſt both of body and ſoul. How is it poſſible we ſhould deſire, conſent, or uſe the means to become

wiſer and better, if we think ourſelves already ſufficiently wiſe and good; or at leaſt, imagine that none of our fellow creatures are able to improve us? There is indeed an unſuſpecting credulity in children, or an over-readineſs to believe every thing they hear, which, ariſing from inexperience, ought to be guarded againſt by thoſe who are older. It is repreſented as part of our Lord's deſign in ſending Apoſtles and other miniſters, "That we henceforth "be no more children, toſſed to and fro, "and carried about with every wind of "doctrine, by the ſlight of men, and cun-"ning craftineſs, whereby they lie in wait "to deceive." But avoiding the credulity and fickleneſs of children, riper age hath often room to imitate the docile or teachable temper of that earlier ſtage of life.

I might introduce here that lovely ſincerity, or freedom from deceit, for which childhood, in general, is more remarkable than advanced age. Oh what pity it is, that the innocence of it ſhould ever be corrupted in that great and pernicious ſchool the world!

world! This good habit is what St. Paul recommends under the name of ſimplicity, in the better meaning of that word: "I "would have you wiſe unto that which is "good, and ſimple concerning evil."

But I proceed to the laſt particular before propoſed, in which childhood, imperfect as it is, may yet be the inſtructor of age; benignity and a forgiving temper, in oppoſition to malice and revenge. There are few indeed in the earlier part of life, who entertain an habitual hatred to any of their fellow creatures: And though many of them may be ſubject to anger, yet, generally, they ſuffer it to be very ſoon extinguiſhed. There is hardly need of cautioning them not to "let the ſun go down upon their wrath." How happy would it be, could the ſame applauſe be ſafely pronounced on the majority of their elders! But St. Paul's advice ſeems to inſinuate the contrary: "Brethren, "be not children in underſtanding; how-"beit, in malice be ye children; but in "underſtanding be men."

Upon

Upon the whole, we ſee the reaſons why our Lord hath a predilection or preferable love for children, and declares as he doth, "Except ye be converted and become as "little children, ye ſhall not enter into the "kingdom of heaven;" and again, "Who-"ſoever ſhall humble himſelf as this little "child, the ſame is greateſt in the kingdom "of heaven."

By way of improvement, let us cultivate in our hearts, as we have great and perpetual cauſe, a thankful admiration of God and the Redeemer's goodneſs. According to the advice of the Saviour, who himſelf condeſcended to become a child, and to grow in wiſdom as well as ſtature, let us not be aſhamed to learn goodneſs from the weakeſt and the youngeſt. Not to dwell at preſent on the connection of this ſubject with infant-baptiſm, let us by fervent prayer devote our children to God through the Redeemer; improving in them, while ſpared to us, whatever is good; checking whatever is evil; and ſo far from offending or ſubverting one of theſe little ones by ill counſel

or

or example, rather ſtrenuouſly applying all ſuitable means to prepare them for the heavenly kingdom.

*Finally*; From our Lord's kind repreſentation and treatment of little children, let us learn—I know—I feel—alas! I have five times felt with an aking heart that it is a very hard leſſon; but as it is moſt uſeful and inſtructive, let us hence learn—to be reconciled to the death of our children.

Methinks I behold the compaſſionate Redeemer, with all that divine benignity ſo natural to his aſpect, on ſuch an occaſion ſtooping down from his radiant throne, and pronouncing, though in a ſenſe ſomewhat different, the gracious words of the text: "Suffer little children to come unto me, "and forbid them not; for of ſuch is the "kingdom of God.—Do you wiſh them to "continue in that ſtate of miſery? Do "you know what temptations, what ſins, "what exquiſite ſufferings they have eſca-"ped? Do you conſider that hapleſs mul-"titudes will wiſh hereafter, that, like

"them

" them, they had died in infancy or child-
" hood? Can you imagine that your affec-
" tion for them is greater than mine? Can
" it enter your thoughts, that though I
" was willing and able to bleſs children
" upon earth, I am leſs able and willing to
" bleſs them in this ſtate of glory? Cheer-
" fully truſt them therefore to my care. I
" have the diſpoſal of them by my Father's
" appointment. How is it poſſible they
" ſhould want a friend; or who is able to
" pluck them out of my Father's or my
" hands? Submit therefore to the divine
" allotments; carefully improve every afflic-
" tion; imitate whatever is amiable in the
" innocence of childhood; and then, as to
" thoſe you have loſt, they will ſoon claſp
" you with longing arms in this bleſſed
" world, where you ſhall never loſe them
" more."

Moſt compaſſionate Redeemer! Thou bright repreſentation of paternal Deity, we reſign them—we ſubmit. Whatever pangs it coſt us, provided we have heavenly aid, not our's, but the eternal Father's moſt perfect will be done!

SERMON

# SERMON XI.

## THE MORAL CONQUEST.

*ROMANS* xii. 21.

BE NOT OVERCOME OF EVIL, BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.

MANKIND in the preſent ſtate are of ſo unhappy a diſpoſition, they are ſo influenced by prejudice, by ſelf-intereſt, and by a variety of wicked paſſions, that either in our perſons, property, or good name, we are perpetually expoſed to injuries from each other. Indeed were the tempers of men ever ſo well reſtrained and well balanced, and their mutual behaviour ever ſo juſt and benevolent, we ſhould ſtill ſuffer numerous calamities from the very condition of our nature, and that of the inanimate world around us. But as if all this were not ſufficient, as if the weakneſs of our bodies, the irregularity of the elements, and the caſualties of life, were not enough to afflict us; a great addition muſt be made to

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our miſeries by the malignity of voluntary agents. We are no more capable of abſolutely controlling the paſſions of our fellow-creatures, than of regulating the wind and ocean; we guard not more infallibly againſt injuries, than againſt accident, ſickneſs, or death.

What now muſt be done? Is evil to conquer us in every reſpect; and if it cannot be altogether prevented, is there no way of ſurmounting it? Surely there is, and the voice of wiſdom, ſpeaking in the text, will teach us this excellent method: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome "evil with good." The virtuous and religious mind may be ſtill, in a very important ſenſe, unconquerable; and may gain a triumph over injuries, which will be preferable either to eſcaping or avenging them.

The prohibition in the former part of our text implies, that we ſuffer not ourſelves to be conquered by injuries with regard either to our happineſs or integrity.

They

They ſhould not in the firſt place make us fall into exceſſive ſorrow, or deprive us of the poſſeſſion of ourſelves. That the kind of evil of which the Apoſtle is ſpeaking is the evil of injury, or unjuſt treatment, is manifeſt, as I might have obſerved before, from the preceding context. "Recompence to no man evil for evil.—If it be "poſſible, as much as lieth in you, live "peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, "avenge not yourſelves,—inflict no pains "or penalties on your adverſaries for the "ſake of gratifying paſſion, which is the "true definition of revenge,—but rather "give place unto wrath,"—give way to the diſpleaſure of God againſt offenders; leave them to his judgment.—"For it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, ſaith the "Lord."—Though God hath no paſſion to gratify, yet when he puniſhes the impenitent, in the language of men he is ſaid to revenge.—"Therefore, if thine enemy hun"ger, feed him; if he thirſt, give him "drink: For in ſo doing thou ſhalt heap "coals of fire upon his head." This paſſage, which is quoted from Prov. xxv. 21,

is

is thus explained by ſeveral good interpreters. If thine enemy ſhould prove impenitent, inſtead of taking revenge thyſelf, leave him to the judgment of God; but perhaps thy kind actions may ſoften his obdurate temper, as metals are melted by fire. This whole context alludes, as ſome imagine, to the perſecution then lately carried on againſt the Chriſtians by the Emperor Claudius. It manifeſtly appears by the deduction, that the evil meant by the Apoſtle in the text is the evil of injury; which Chriſtians ſhould not ſuffer ſo to overcome them as to render them too uneaſy, or deprive them of the poſſeſſion of themſelves. It is true, our paſſions and feelings are not altogether in our own power. Some perſons have naturally a greater ſenſibility than others, and therefore a quicker perception of injury. But a degree of power we certainly have over our ſentiments of this kind; and by wiſe reflection, by an earneſt and habitual effort of the ſoul, and by fervent prayer, we may render them more reaſonable and moderate. For this very purpoſe we were placed in a ſtate of trial with ſuch

diſpoſitions

diſpoſitions as we now have. For juſt as in the natural world materials are given, not ready prepared for uſe, but rude and rough, to be wrought and faſhioned by human diligence and ſkill; ſo in the moral world, our appetites, paſſions, and affections, are allotted us to be formed and regulated, under the divine bleſſing, by our own induſtry and contrivance. In order properly to ſhape theſe materials, we muſt "lay judgment to "the line, and righteouſneſs to the plum-"met," and exert ourſelves with ſuitable vigour.

It is ſurely not impracticable to render our minds, in ſome meaſure, firm and impregnable againſt the attacks of injury and provocation. We have read of ſome, who, though naturally very ſuſceptible of the harſher paſſions, and at the ſame time deſtitute of Chriſtian light, have yet accompliſhed this work, and acquired a high degree of tranquillity, patience, and fortitude. Shall not the example of ſuch perſons be emulated, and even excelled by Chriſtians? To fall ſhort of it would certainly not be very

honourable; but not to follow it, would be a ſcandal to the Chriſtian name. Whoever profeſſes to be a good man, or a diſciple of the bleſſed Jeſus, ſhould be ſo far proof againſt the attacks of the injurious, as to have a fountain of happineſs within himſelf, not flowing from their good will, and not to be ſtopped by their malevolence. No man is conquered merely by receiving injuries; but it is he that is truly overcome, whom injuries render miſerable.

Neither, in the next place, ſhould we permit evil ſo far to conquer us, as to make us fall into exceſſive anger. That ſome degree of anger, being natural, is therefore lawful, no one can reaſonably doubt; eſpecially when it is conſidered that it is only the meaſure and duration of it, which the holy ſcriptures condemn. "Be ye angry "and ſin not: Let not the ſun go down "upon your wrath; neither give place to "the devil." Nor yet is it leſs apparent, that this paſſion was intended by providence for a wiſe purpoſe; even as a ſpur to ſelf-defence. But how dreadful is anger beyond a certain

a certain degree! It's ill conſequences exceed all deſcription. He who is ſubject to the extravagances of this paſſion is a miſerable ſlave; and he who can be thrown into thoſe extravagances by injuries, is the ſlave and captive of every man living who wantonly or maliciouſly offends him.

Much leſs ſhould ill uſage ſo conquer us as to make us return one injury for another. I ſay one injury; for though a perſon ſhould do me ever ſo much wrong in my property, reputation, or any other reſpect, that is no good reaſon why I ſhould do him ſimilar wrong. Though I puniſh him, I ought not to wrong him. There is juſtice due even to the worſt of men. If the offence of another provoke me to treat him beyond the bounds of equity, he hath conquered me indeed; he hath not only conquered me, but plundered me of that beſt jewel, my integrity. His ſinning is no reaſon why I ſhould ſin; for if his provocations have this effect, when he endeavoured only to injure me in my temporal concerns, I have injured myſelf in my ſpiritual.

We are here likewiſe forbidden to be ſo conquered of evil, as to be induced to execute revenge of any kind or degree. This is plain from the context already quoted, and from numerous other paſſages of holy writ. The execution of revenge has been already defined to be the infliction of evil purely to gratify anger. The infliction of evil on offenders for ſelf-redreſs, for future ſafety, for their reformation, for a terror to others, or in any reſpect for the private or public good, is the true notion of puniſhment, as contradiſtinguiſhed from revenge, which is only a gratification of paſſion. The former, in many caſes, is not only lawful but a duty. The latter, as inconſiſtent with the benevolence we owe to the worſt of men, and as tending alſo to perpetuate and increaſe feuds in ſociety, is always prohibited.

If the reſiſting of evil, with regard to perſon or property, is forbidden in ſcripture, the prohibition ſeems to be in ſome meaſure peculiar to that age of perſecution, when reſiſtance would have been of no uſe unleſs

unleſs to ſtimulate rage, and draw on an augmentation of ill uſage; and when Chriſtianity was to conquer, not by means of human force, but rather of human ſuffering: And therefore, it ought not to be taken at preſent in the moſt rigorous ſenſe. Thus likewiſe, if the proſecution of legal redreſs is condemned by St. Paul, the reaſon was, that ſome of the firſt Chriſtians expoſed themſelves and their religion, by going to law with one another before heathen judges. On which account he adviſes them to a reference among themſelves,—the very advice which ſhould now in a like caſe be followed,—and, rather than bring ſuch a ſcandal on the cauſe, exhorts them to ſuffer wrong. "Is it ſo, that there is not a wiſe "man among you; no, not one that ſhall be "able to judge between his brethren? But "brother goeth to law with brother, and "that before the unbelievers." In the mean while, the execution of revenge, or the infliction of evil by the decree of paſſion, the blindeſt, the moſt iniquitous, the moſt arbitrary and extravagant of all judges, is what we ſhould never ſuffer ourſelves to be

betrayed into by any provocation, ſuch conduct being directly oppoſite to the laws and ſpirit of Chriſtianity.

Our text in the ſecond place contains a precept, which goes beyond the prohibition already explained: "Overcome evil with "good." Reſt not contented that you are not conquered by evil, but cheriſh the ambition of gaining a conqueſt over it. You ſhould ſtrive not to eſcape but triumph. Shew yourſelves ſuperior to the provocation of injuries, and, if poſſible, put an end to them, and ſubdue the malignity of thoſe who offer them, by your amiable diſpoſitions and kind actions in return. Follow the bright pattern of the bleſſed Redeemer, not only by wiſhing well to, and praying for your enemies, but being ready alſo to do them good; eſpecially that greateſt good, in which one mortal can be inſtrumental towards another, the ſoftening, winning, and ſubduing of their hearts by your better example, and the promotion of their eternal welfare.

There

There is ſomething ſo excellent and god-like in true goodneſs, carried to it's proper height, and nobly perſevering in generous and undeſerved offices, that in a fair conteſt it is much too ſtrong for malevolence. There is in truth a continual war between them in the univerſe, and I make no doubt but goodneſs will finally prevail. I hope, and believe, that there are few, if any hearts, ſo hardened in malice, as not to feel the powerful charm of benevolence and unmerited kindneſs. But, alas! how ſeldom, in compariſon, is the experiment fairly made. Multitudes, who are not very bad in themſelves, yet ſeem to think that every thing is to be done with mankind by clamour and rough defiance; whereas, this is, as it were, ſounding the ſignal to battle, and calling upon perſons to arm in defence againſt us: And, on the contrary, you may prevail a thouſand times ſooner with the rudeſt and profaneſt by mildneſs, than you can by fierceneſs and fury. There are many alſo who ſeem to imagine that meekneſs of ſpirit and benevolent manners imply cowardice; and therefore, they muſt put on the appea-

rance even of greater fierceneſs than they feel, in order to maintain reſpect, and preſerve their characters. Whereas, in fact, nothing can be more abſurd, and contrary to general experience: For true courage, unleſs attended with much folly, is too ſteady and unconcerned to be boiſtrous; and the boiſtrous, upon trial, are ſeldom found to be brave. Upon the whole, goodneſs, were it but thoroughly and uniformly exerted, would be the greateſt of all conquerors.

A variety of motives incite us to comply with the prohibition and precept in the text. The ſpirit there recommended is neceſſary to our own tranquillity and comfort. In reality, were we diſpoſed to wiſh an enemy the greateſt puniſhment and curſe he could ſuffer on this ſide hell, there is nothing we could wiſh him half ſo dreadful, as his continuing the ſlave of revengeful and ungoverned paſſions. How then is it poſſible, unleſs we are enemies to our own peace, that we ſhould harbour ſuch paſſions ourſelves? On the other hand, next to devotion

tion and the favour of God, is there any thing, which, in the kindeſt and moſt ſerious hour, we ſhould more earneſtly pray for in behalf of a friend or beloved child, than that he ſhould be of a mild, benevolent, and forgiving temper, and ever diſpoſed to return good for evil? But why therefore, in the name of God and of every thing that is good and happy, ſhould we not cultivate this very diſpoſition ourſelves? He who entertains a revengeful temper, is not only led into a great deal of guilt, but has his happineſs ever dependent on the mercy of other men. His enemies have him the moſt abſolutely in their power that can poſſibly be imagined; for they can make him miſerable at whatever time and in whatever degree they pleaſe. Nay, in reality, he contains within his own breaſt an inexhauſtible treaſure of miſery. On the contrary, the felicity of the benevolent man is in a great meaſure independent on his fellow creatures, and even raiſes contributions from their very malevolence. If any mortal can be ſaid to partake in the joys of the eternal and all-benevolent Creator, he is the man.

If

If any thing on earth could juſtly deſerve envy, this would be the object.

Compaſſion for ſinners, who of all others are the greateſt objects of compaſſion, is likewiſe a ſtrong inducement to the temper and practice here recommended. Revenge is itſelf guilt, and has a tendency to increaſe and perpetuate guilt on both ſides. On the contrary, a forgiveneſs of injuries, and a return of good for evil, are excellent virtues, and calculated to produce penitence, virtue, and every thing good and happy, both in time and eternity. No good man, I am certain, will rejoice in the day of judgment on finding that his enemies have proved impenitent, and are condemned to miſery and deſtruction. On the other hand, how noble muſt be his triumph in that awful day, to find that all who have offended him had forſaken their iniquities, made their peace with God as well as with him, and were admitted to unite with him in the regions of perfect love. Will it then, do you imagine, give you any pleaſure to reflect, that you, by an implacable ſpirit, have hardened

ſinners,

ſinners, and contributed your part to increaſe the inhabitants of hell? Surely the contrary reflection, the idea that by generous goodneſs you had turned their hearts, muſt be a ſource of ineffable tranſport.

Let us remember on this occaſion the admirable worth, beauty, and excellence of ſuch a temper and conduct. So obvious a truth is not to be ſupported ſo much by reaſoning as by appealing to every man's breaſt. Is there nothing amiable and worthy of admiration in the temper of Job, who could ſolemnly declare, that he had never "rejoiced at the deſtruction of him that "hated him, or lifted up himſelf when "evil found him?" Or in that of the firſt Chriſtian martyr, who in his dying moments prayed for thoſe who ſtoned him, "Lay not this ſin to their charge?" Or finally, in the interceſſion of Chriſt for his crucifiers, "Father forgive them, for "they know not what they do?" What think you of Solomon's encomium on the temper I am now recommending. "He that "is ſlow to anger is better than the mighty, "and

"and he that ruleth his ſpirit than he that "taketh a city." If any one can be inſenſible to the excellence of ſuch a diſpoſition, let him for a moment imagine himſelf to be the perſon forgiven, and to have generous returns made him for the moſt outrageous injuries. Were this his own caſe, he would certainly be the firſt to celebrate and extol the godlike heart that gave him ſuch unmerited treatment.

*Laſtly*; We ſhould all be induced to cultivate this diſpoſition by the approbation, example, and authority of God and Chriſt. The conduct of providence, but eſpecially the great work of redemption, with regard both to the Father and his bleſſed Son, is a ſhining pattern of clemency and goodneſs; and it is equally manifeſt that our forgiveneſs of others, and beneficence towards them, are indiſpenſible terms of our own forgiveneſs, and our attainment of the divine approbation. The example of God in his providence, with which I ſhall conclude—and may it make a durable impreſſion upon all our hearts!—is repreſented in very

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ſtriking language by the Redeemer himſelf. "Ye have heard that it hath been ſaid, "Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour, and hate "thine enemy: But I ſay unto you, Love "your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, "do good to them that hate you, and pray "for them that deſpiteſully uſe you and "perſecute you: That ye may be the chil-"dren of your Father which is in heaven; "for he maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil "and on the good, and ſendeth rain on the "juſt and on the unjuſt. For if ye love "them which love you, what reward have "ye? Do not even the publicans the ſame? "And if ye ſalute your brethren, what do "you more than others? Do not even the "publicans ſo? Be ye therefore perfect, "even as your Father which is in heaven is "perfect."

SERMON

# SERMON XII.

## ON THE CAUSES AND DANGER OF RELIGIOUS PROCRASTINATION.

*ACTS* xxiv. 25.

GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

WHEN conviction is once raiſed in the breaſt of a ſinner, in order to be eaſy, he muſt either forget it, or elſe make uſe of ſubterfuges and evaſions which may delude him into a falſe tranquility: For no man in his ſenſes can deliberately brave omnipotence, and bid defiance to the offended Majeſty of Heaven. Suppoſe him perſuaded that God will never be reconciled to ſin, that himſelf is guilty, and that he can never hide his iniquity; imagine him to dwell upon theſe thoughts, to be impenitent, and yet contented and cheerful, and you repreſent him as deprived of reaſon. In caſes of this kind there muſt always be ſome deceitfulneſs of ſin, ſome ſubtilty of temptation, by which he impoſes upon himſelf.

himſelf. And indeed we are ever ready to invent reaſons for what we like, we are ſoon ſatisfied of the ſafety of what we are inclined to, and our deſires communicate of their own deepneſs and ſtrength to thoſe ſhadows of arguments by which they are juſtified and flattered.

Among other inventions which the ſinner applies in order to deceive his conſcience, and amuſe himſelf into eternal ruin, is that before us in the text. He fondly perſuades himſelf, that though at preſent he have no inclination to repent, yet hereafter he ſhall entirely diſcharge that great duty, and apply himſelf in good earneſt to the concerns of religion and eternity. He readily acknowledges that penitence is neceſſary, and that without it there is no pardon; that the ſervice of God is perfectly reaſonable; that the offers of the Saviour are very compaſſionate, and that the practice of ſin is extremely dangerous. But then it unhappily falls out that you could not have addreſſed him upon theſe affairs at a more unſeaſonable time, and at preſent he hath a thouſand

reaſons

reaſons for delaying his religion, which hereafter will be all removed. Indeed, I pretend not that all this hath been often ſaid in ſo many words: But the queſtion is —if it will bear a queſtion—whether careleſs and corrupt men have not, in numberleſs inſtances, whiſpered this folly to themſelves; and whether, by vain pretences of this kind, they are not frequently rendered eaſy in the neglect of a religious life.

It happens however that this very fallacy is expreſſed, exactly in the ſame language, by the ſinner in the text. When the holy Apoſtle, more illuſtrious than his judge, and of truer dignity than he who had the diſpoſal of his life, appeared before Felix, he reproved him for his vices ſo prudently and yet ſo forcibly, that the Roman governor, a man of a moſt abandoned character, but not entirely loſt to a ſenſe of good and evil, was ſtruck with horror. "As St. "Paul reaſoned of righteouſneſs, tempe-"rance, and a judgment to come, Felix "trembled." Behold here the energy of the goſpel, though delivered by a preacher

in chains! Behold here the authority of conſcience, though ſtrongly oppoſed by united guilt and power! The priſoner here was in reality the judge, and the judge the convicted criminal. Felix trembled. But what was the conſequence? Did he cheerfully ſubmit to the powerful reaſonings of the Apoſtle, embrace Chriſtianity, and renounce his guilt? Alas! far from it. It is true, he trembled; but then he took a reſolution, and made an anſwer, which will be an eternal infamy to his name. "Go "thy way for this time; when I have a "convenient ſeaſon I will call for thee." The great apologiſt for Chriſtianity touched him in too tender a part to be any longer heard with patience; and the unhappy hearer was too irreſolute or too proud to repent. The thunder of the Apoſtle's eloquence was too alarming to be endured; but the thoughts of repentance were leſs tolerable ſtill. The tender conviction is therefore ſtifled in it's birth, and a vain plea is immediately invented to bribe the integrity of conſcience. "Go thy way for this time;

"when

" when I have a convenient ſeaſon I will " call for thee."

In farther conſidering this ſubject, I think it will not be without it's advantage to examine one or two reaſons which are commonly advanced to prove the preſent inconvenience of entering upon a religious life, and then to offer ſome general arguments for haſtening this great concern.

Among other fallacious reaſons which are advanced to ſhew the preſent inconvenience of entering upon a religious life, it is ſometimes pleaded by impenitent ſinners, that hitherto they are but in early life, and that it will be then time enough to attend religion when they are leſs capable of pleaſure and more capable of reflection. This fallacy, upon ſome occaſions, is openly advanced, but I dare anſwer for it, is inwardly pleaded in thouſands of inſtances more. " Why were theſe paſſions and appetites " given us, if not to be indulged; and when " ſhall we indulge them, if not when they " are moſt vigorous and lively? Religion

" demands a certain ſerioufneſs, which is " not ſo natural or ſuited to youth, but " which maturer years will bring on of " themſelves: And then indeed it will be " proper enough to improve it to the pur- " poſes of piety. Beſides we have a great " length of duration before us, and ſuffici- " ent time to repent and obey the goſpel, " when more at leiſure from other purſuits. " Our penitence, if real, will always be " accepted, be it ever ſo late in life; and " why then ſhould we put an unnatural " force upon ourſelves, and weakly refrain " from thoſe ſatisfactions for which we were " manifeſtly made?" Theſe are the vain and too frequent pretenſions ariſing from the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

Now ſurely it is a great reproach to human reaſon that ſuch arguments muſt be anſwered; and yet they ought to be anſwered out of mere compaſſion to the weakneſs of thoſe who advance them. Do you really imagine then that religion has no pleaſures? That there are no joys in the friendſhip of the Saviour, in communion with God, in the

the offices of piety, and the godlike acts of virtue? Is there no comfort in conſcious integrity, in regulated paſſions, and in the proſpect of eternal glory? Surely you can never imagine it in your more deliberate hours, and if you were not ſtrongly determined to continue in ſin, you could never be ſatisfied with ſuch weak pretenſions to excuſe it.

Again, did you never conſider that religion debars you from no pleaſures which are innocent in themſelves; none which are worthy of an intelligent being; none which are conſiſtent with your true comfort and intereſt, and which can poſſibly be approved of by your own reaſon and conſcience? That it only commands you not to be lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God; and requires you carefully to ſhun thoſe deluſive joys which true wiſdom would teach you to deſpiſe even abſtracting from a future ſtate? Have you never reflected that your paſſions and appetites were given you only to be indulged within certain limits, and that the thankful gratification of them within thoſe

limits even piety itſelf will approve? Have you never remarked that though you are not ſo naturally inclined to ſerioufneſs as perſons in maturer years, yet that you have one advantage even of them; that beſides your being leſs encumbered with worldly concerns, your affections being now more vigorous and cheerful, are more ſuſceptible of devout impreſſions; and fitted to afford you a more exquiſite gladneſs in the ſervice of your heavenly Father.

Beſides, it is the higheſt inſult upon the majeſty of God, to inſinuate that you can take no pleaſure in his ſervice 'till you are capable of ſatisfaction in no other purſuit. It is no leſs than declaring, in other words, that you will ſacrifice to him only the dregs of life; and that in reality, were it poſſible for you to be eternally young, you would eternally deſpiſe his commands. I joyfully perſuade myſelf, that upon proper reflection, your natures are too ingenuous and your hearts too tender, not to be ſhocked with horrour at this impious thought.

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If at your years you have peculiar temptations to run into the paths of the deſtroyer, conſider that for this very reaſon your early piety will be the more laudable, and will certainly meet with peculiar acceptance from the grace of your heavenly Father. Inſtead therefore of treading in the ſteps of that wicked ruler in the text, walk in the track of that amiable king of Judah, who, in ſpite of the ſnares both of childhood and royalty, was ſtedfaſt in the ways of righteouſneſs. "Joſiah was eight years "old when he began to reign. And he "did that which was right in the ſight of "the Lord, and walked in the way of David "his father, and turned not aſide to the "right hand or to the left." Illuſtrious pattern! Moſt attractive example! A conduct that rendered him more truly great than the ſplendor of his elevated ſtation! He put on righteouſneſs as a robe and a diadem.

As to the imagination that you have ſufficient time before you; if you are really aſſured of old age; if you have any ſecurity

that inward diſeaſe or outward accident, that the raging fever or the flame from heaven will never blaſt your hopes; it will then, and not till then be more reaſonable to devote your preſent years to ſenſuality and ſin, and to indulge yourſelves without bounds.

But let us imagine for once that you were certain of a length of years. Are there no excuſes, no vain pretenſions for irreligion, in middle or declining age? Alas! did you never ſee an adult or an aged ſinner? Perſons in thoſe ſtages of life, be aſſured, have their pleas and evaſions as well as you; and pleas, which, in their opinions, are more ſolid than your's and will ſtand them in better ſtead.

Upon the whole then the preſent is the convenient ſeaſon; this is the accepted time, this is the day of ſalvation. Your arguments for delay are vain, are deluſive, are impious. Let me therefore earneſtly entreat you by the examples of the ſaints, by the pleaſures of piety, by the danger of ſin, by the

the worth of your ſouls, by the agonies of the Saviour, and by the omnipotence of the eternal God—to accept inſtantly the offers of the beſt of beings, to ſubmit to him as your heavenly Father, and prepare for an inheritance in his glorious kingdom.

Another plea which the impenitent advance for the inconveniency of preſent repentance is this: That they are too much immerſed in the cares of the preſent world, but that hereafter they ſhall be more at leiſure. Now thoſe in the loweſt decline of age might with equal, nay with greater reaſon plead, that they are diſqualified for the ſervices of religion, by means of weakneſs and diſeaſe. Take but theſe three pretenſions and join them together, and they will form a kind of triumvirate, to the entire excluſion of all religion. Pleaſure in youth, the cares of the world in middle age, and infirmity in our laſt years, will uſurp the whole of our exiſtence in the preſent ſtate, and divide between them the entire empire of life. Thus, upon the whole, we ſhall live without God in the world.

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In the mean while, let us attend to this plea of ſecular avocations and concerns. The whole compaſs and force of the objection is in two words this: We have no time to be religious. And if only one article were added, namely, that we have no inclination, we ſhould account for the whole affair. We have no time to be religious—that is, in other language, we have time enough to purſue trifles—for what is the world, comparatively ſpeaking, but a collection of trifles—whereas, on the other hand, we have not a moment for things of infinite concern. We have ſufficient ſpace for ſeeking earthly ſatisfactions, but none for the attainment of heaven. We have leiſure enough to care for the body, but none for the immortal ſoul. We can find time for unſatisfying momentary joys, but none for unſpeakable and eternal glories. We have an ear always open to the temptations of avarice, but not to the propoſals of the bleſſed Son of God. This is the true drift and force of the objection; and if barely to repreſent it be not to anſwer it, there

there is no difference between ſophiſtry and ſound reaſoning.

If we hearken to him who is the wiſdom of God, he will tell us, "that the "happineſs of life does not conſiſt in the "abundance of the things we poſſeſs, and "that a man is not profited though he gain "the whole world and loſe his own ſoul, "and that there is nothing he can give in "exchange for his ſoul." If we liſten to an inſpired Apoſtle, he will inform us, "that the attainments of this world periſh "with the uſing; and that the things "which are ſeen are temporal, but the "things which are not ſeen eternal." And finally, if we attend to the maxims of a wiſe king, and a king guided by the joint light of experience and the ſpirit of God, he will not ſcruple to aſſure us, that worldly enjoyments are ſo far from beſtowing true happineſs, that they are "vanity and vexa-"tion of ſpirit."

Now this is the world, a world of which mortals have been complaining for almoſt

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ſix thouſand years, which is yet allowed a rivalſhip with God, and to interfere between him and us. We read of another world infinitely more worthy of our attachment; where there is fulneſs of joy and pleaſure for evermore: And yet, we abandon that better ſtate, and exchange it for vanity and wretchedneſs. Such is the blindneſs, the unaccountable blindneſs and infatuation of the human mind! But this madneſs of iniquity our Lord hath long ago predicted: "He alſo that received ſeed "among the thorns, is he that heareth the "word; and the care of this world, and the "deceitfulneſs of riches, choke the word, "and he becometh unfruitful." And one of the Apoſtles hath given us a very expreſs caution upon this head: "Love not "the world, neither the things that are in "the world: If any man love the world,— "that is, to exceſs,—the love of the Father "is not in him."

I pleaſe myſelf with the hope that there are none preſent who would advance ſo weak and unreaſonable an objection againſt religion

gion as that which we are now conſidering. But we can never be too ſtrongly guarded againſt the inſinuations of ſo deceitful an enemy as the world. Let us then only conſider, that, truly to enjoy it, we ſhould render it ſubſervient to the divine honour, and our better and more durable intereſt; that then, and then only, it is attended with a bleſſing; that ſuffering it therefore to encroach upon religion is not right even for our preſent happineſs; that, as our leiſure depends much upon our inclination, if we are not now at leiſure for our ſpiritual concerns, we ſhall hereafter be ſtill more engaged; and that we ourſelves, in a dying hour, ſhall not only ſee but feel the vanity of that ſtate which we ſo highly value. This ſhould be the grand inquiry of an immortal ſpirit: "What ſhall I eſteem, what "ſhall I admire, and what will avail me "when I ſtand upon the brink of eter-"nity?" Were this reflection more preſent and familiar to our minds, we ſhould judge and eſteem and act in a very different manner.

Let

Let us now proceed to thoſe general arguments which hold againſt delaying repentance. And here we ought to conſider, that the longer we delay our penitence, the longer we debar ourſelves of thoſe genuine pleaſures which true religion affords. If you believe experience, nay, if you pay any credit to the dictates of that God who made you, "the ways of religious wiſdom "are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her "paths are peace." Where indeed can peace and tranquility be found, if not in the conſciouſneſs of pardoned guilt, and the rational ſenſe of God's favour and friendſhip through the mediation of his Son? Where, again, ſhall we find pleaſure, if not in contemplating the divine attributes, relying upon the divine promiſes, becoming partakers of a divine nature, holding an intercourſe with the beſt of beings, and triumphing in the proſpect of his future and eternal friendſhip. We may ſeek for true pleaſure where we can, but we may aſſure ourſelves that her reſidence is not upon earth, if ſhe dwell not in the religious breaſt.

Take

Take then the evaſion of Felix, who may be conſidered as the repreſentative of all careleſs and irreſolute ſinners, and view it in this light. "Go thy way for this time; "when I have a convenient ſeaſon I will "call for thee. Do not interrupt me; at "preſent I have no time to be happy." A notable ſpeech, and worthy of that worldly wiſdom by which it was inſpired!

But conſider farther, that all the difficulties which now keep us from religion will hereafter be more violent and ſtrong. In all probability, that convenient ſeaſon, with the hope of which we flatter ourſelves, will never come; but, the longer we delay, will be the farther removed from us. Is pleaſure our objection? Our appetite for pleaſure, the more we indulge it, will be the more fierce and headſtrong. Nay, when the real appetite is deceaſed, the very ghoſt of it will remain to haunt, to miſlead, and perplex us. Is buſineſs the difficulty? But that difficulty, it is probable, will increaſe; for even religious men find it an arduous

arduous taſk to reduce their cares, and keep them from gaining upon their hearts. Do we plead our diſaffection to ſpiritual and divine things, and the violence of our other paſſions? The leaſt inſight into human nature will convince us, that this diſaffection will gain ſtrength by habit, and that our lawleſs inclinations, if now our maſters, will hereafter be our more cruel tyrants. Sinful deſires, at firſt, ſeem to intreat; by degrees they demand with a ſort of inſolent aſſurance, and in the end they triumph and enſlave us. Where then will be the more convenient ſeaſon?

Let us learn wiſdom in ſpiritual from our own maxims in temporal concerns; for it is ſaid—and pity it is that it can be ſaid—"that the children of this world are wiſer "in their generation than the children of "light." Delay in temporal things is univerſally derided and deſpiſed. But things ſpiritual are of infinitely greater worth. Take the inference in the words of the Pſalmiſt, "Let us make haſte, and not de-"lay to keep God's commandments."

In

In the laſt place, let us ſeriouſly conſider the uncertainty of human life. Is it really fit for ſuch a creature as man, a creature ſo frail in the conſtruction of his body, and expoſed to the conſtant inroads of ſuch a hoſt of accidents,—is it fit for ſuch a creature to talk of a more convenient ſeaſon? A reaſonable being, otherwiſe unacquainted with human life, muſt inſtantly conclude from this anſwer of Felix, that it was abſolutely impoſſible for this mighty governor to die an untimely death. But as ſoon as he was informed that this ruler was a frail creature, whom diſeaſe might deſtroy, the lightening blaſt, nay, an inſect hurl into the grave, he could not fail of concluding him deprived of reaſon.

We have heard—and that very lately—of thoſe who had not even a moment granted them to look back upon life, or forward upon an awful eternity: And of others, who, though allowed a few moments, had only ſpace, when ſtruck with the ſudden flaſh, to move a few ſteps and then lay them down and die. Dreadful thought!

And yet their lot may be our's. Let us now therefore ſeize the flying inſtant; let us now be earneſt in our applications to God, believe in the Saviour, exerciſe repentance, enter upon all the duties of the Chriſtian character, and lay hold on eternal life. This, perhaps, may be our laſt admonition; and if we loſe this moment, we may loſe our ſouls for ever.

To conclude all; we ſhould carry this as a maxim of the divine life: That no objection ſhould reſtrain us from any obſervance of Chriſtianity, but what we are perſuaded, upon ſerious thought, will be admitted in the laſt judgment. All our pretences muſt be tried there; and if we are certainly convinced they will hold at our Lord's tribunal, let them ſtill prevail; for otherwiſe it is madneſs to regard them.

SERMON

# SERMON XIII.

## ON THE FOLLY AND IMPIETY OF HUMAN PRESUMPTION.

*JAMES* iv. 13, 14, 15, 16.

GO TO NOW, YE THAT SAY, TO-DAY, OR TO-MORROW, WE WILL GO INTO SUCH A CITY, AND CONTINUE THERE A YEAR, AND BUY, AND SELL, AND GET GAIN: WHEREAS YE KNOW NOT WHAT SHALL BE ON THE MORROW. FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? IT IS EVEN A VAPOUR THAT APPEARETH FOR A LITTLE TIME, AND THEN VANISHETH AWAY. FOR THAT YE OUGHT TO SAY, IF THE LORD WILL, WE SHALL LIVE, AND DO THIS OR THAT. BUT NOW YE REJOICE IN YOUR BOASTINGS: ALL SUCH REJOICING IS EVIL.

THOUGH religion ſhould uniformly run through the whole tenour of our lives, yet it is a practice becoming the character and ſuiting the condition of reaſonable creatures and Chriſtians, to ſet apart particular ſeaſons, for the cloſer and more ſolemn contemplation of God and their duty. Thus the diviſions of time, whether natural or artificial; the returning anniverſaries of ſome remarkable mercy; and the entrance and cloſe of our conſiderable engagements, are peculiarly fitted for this pious

deſign. Our ſabbaths, for inſtance, very happily ſeparate our weeks; and, if rightly improved, would preſerve us from a worldly temper, from the diſſipations of a thoughtleſs and the inſenſibility of a too buſy ſpirit. Our acts of devotion at the beginning and end of our meals, if they were really devout, would keep up a remembrance of our obligations to that Being, whoſe bread we eat, and who, if it ſeemed fit to infinite wiſdom, might convert our food into poiſon. Our perſonal and family ſervices in the morning and evening, if ſeriouſly conſidered and duly diſcharged, would tend to the ſame purpoſe. And in like manner, the returns of thoſe ſeaſons when we ourſelves, or the public in general, had received any ſignal deliverances or other mercies, if ſpent in meditation, and celebrated with piety, would obtain us a bleſſing in the preſent life, and prepare us for the happineſs of the future.

This ſurely, of which I am now ſpeaking, is extremely different from a ſuperſtitious obſervation

obſervation of times and ſeaſons. Superſtition proceeds upon the abſurd notion that ſome days are in themſelves much better than others; it impoſes, as a ſtrict duty, what God has left to our own diſcretion; it too much favours the popiſh veneration of ſaints; and places the obſervance of days and ſeaſons in the room of ſubſtantial goodneſs. But true piety, from which ſuperſtition is widely different, acts upon another principle. It only chooſes, in a voluntary manner and from reaſons of religious prudence, thoſe particular times for acts of worſhip, when the heart is moſt apt to be affected. And yet if any one ſhould think himſelf beſt diſpoſed, and judge it moſt convenient for his own circumſtances and affairs, to worſhip, whether alone or with his family, rather at noon than in the earlier hours of the day; it would ſcarcely be worth while to diſpute his opinion, nor lawful to deprive him of his liberty. Let him only worſhip with ſincerity and ſerioufneſs, let him but keep up a daily intercourſe with the God of his life, let him judge of the fitteſt times with impartiality and care;

and the particular hours may be left to his own choice.

But though we ſhould guard againſt all ſuperſtition, and tho' eſpecially, we ſhould never infringe upon Chriſtian liberty; yet, that there are ſeaſons peculiarly fitted for devout purpoſes, on account either of our circumſtances, our tempers, the paſt events of our lives, or the remarkable partitions of time, is extremely evident. Among theſe happy ſeaſons, I particularly recommend the commencement of a new year, to which, through the kind providence and protection of God, we are once more ſafely arrived.

There are two follies, and indeed very criminal follies, with regard to our time and the events of life, into which we are apt to run: The one a forgetfulneſs of paſt mercies, which is contrary to devout gratitude; the other a preſumptuous neglect of our heavenly Father for the time to come, which is oppoſed to religious dependence. An occaſion is afforded us by the words of our

our text, to conſider both theſe ſinful abſurdities, and eſpecially the latter.

The holy Apoſtle, after having reproved, in the preceding part of the chapter, a variety of other ſinners, turns him at length to thoſe worldly minds, who are always confident of ſucceeding in their ſchemes, and affect to be independent of providence. "Go to now, ye that ſay, To-day, or to-"morrow, we will go into ſuch a city and "continue there a year, and buy, and ſell, "and get gain." Come on, ye preſumptuous and vain creatures, who flatter yourſelves with the ſanguine expectation of life and proſperity; I have now ſomething to offer, which is ſuited alſo to your folly and guilt. You will go, it ſeems, to day or to-morrow, into ſuch a city, and buy, and ſell, and get gain. How glaringly abſurd! You are ſo far from being certain what events may happen in the courſe of a year, that you do not ſo much as know "what may "be on the morrow. For what is your "life? It is even a vapour that appeareth "for a little time, and then vaniſheth

"away. For that ye ought to ſay, If the "Lord will, we ſhall live, and do this or "that. But now ye rejoice in your boaſ-"tings"—your viſionary proſpects and profane ſelf-confidence afford you a great deal of joyous pleaſure, but—"all ſuch rejoicing "is evil."

We are called by the text, now eſpecially, at the entrance of a new year, to conſider that criminal folly which the Apoſtle reproves, which is no other than our engaging with preſumption in worldly concerns, puffed up with exceſſive confidence, and without a dependence upon God. We find by the deſcription which Saint James hath given us, that mankind have been juſt the ſame in every age of the world. If we had not been ſure that he addreſſed himſelf more immediately to his own contemporaries, we ſhould have thought that he had written prophetically of the generation in our days. But ſelf-confidence, ſanguine and unreaſonable hopes, and forgetfulneſs of providence, were in faſhion ſeventeen hundred years ago, as they are now; ſo that we

are now habitually guilty of ſin and folly, in ſpite of the experience of ages.

I readily acknowledge, that ſome kind and ſome degree of hope, with reference to our worldly concerns, is not only lawful but neceſſary. Without it our powers would languiſh, and we ſhould never have the reſolution to exert ourſelves. Who would cultivate and ſow his lands, if he had not the expectation of reaping? Who would ever engage in the trades and labours of life, if he had not the proſpect of ſome gain; if he were not animated with the pleaſing views of obtaining a proviſion for himſelf and his family, and poſſibly, of making ſome little figure in the world? This deſire is implanted more or leſs in every breaſt, and therefore, I infer, lawful. But it is not a moderate and reaſonable hope which the Apoſtle condemns; it is only a ſanguine and exceſſive confidence, which makes no account of uncertainties and croſſes, reckons upon events as infallibly ſure, and impiouſly excludes the Deity out of all it's ſchemes. It is that abſurd and profane

temper

temper which depends upon years, when it is not ſure of moments. It is the fooliſh and ſinful diſpoſition of the rich man in the parable, who, after a harveſt of more than ordinary plenty, makes to himſelf this notable ſpeech: "Soul, thou haſt much goods "laid up for many years; take thine eaſe, "eat, drink, and be merry."

On the contrary, the duty which the Apoſtle recommends in oppoſition to the fault reprehended, is not that deſpairing and uncomfortable temper, which we obſerve in ſome perſons with regard to their temporal, as well as their ſpiritual concerns. They are always uneaſy, ever tormenting themſelves with their own reflections, and ſo afraid of want, when there is not the leaſt reaſon for ſuch extraordinary apprehenſions, that they reliſh no bleſſing they poſſeſs. But ſurely there is a wide difference between moderate hopes and pining melancholy fears. This laſt diſpoſition is, in reality, ſo far from a duty, that together with a great unhappineſs of natural conſtitution, it carries in it a mixture of ſin. It diſtruſts

diſtruſts God, who has not given us the leaſt reaſon to diſtruſt him; it is jealous of his promiſes, which are immoveably founded; it diſhonours his goodneſs, which we have not only ſeen diſplayed, but ourſelves ſo richly experienced.

But the real duty which the Apoſtle recommends, is a humble dependence upon God. "Ye ought to ſay, If the Lord will, "we ſhall live, and do this or that." He does not mean that perſons ſhould be perpetually uſing ſuch words, whenever they expreſs a reſolution or hope, (though even ſuch words may be laudably uſed, provided it be done with ſincerity, without affectation, and on ſuitable occaſions) but what he principally intends is, that we maintain an habitual ſenſe of our dependence upon God; that we conſider events as being under his management, and reckon upon no deſign, no project, no proſperity, without his concurrence and bleſſing. Nay, we cannot with certainty expect even his concurrence and bleſſing in our temporal concerns, though we earneſtly apply to him, and ſeek him

him in the practice of our duty; for we have no certain promiſe under the goſpel of temporal proſperity, and therefore we ſhould always hope with humble ſubmiſſion and reſerve. "If the Lord will, we ſhall live "and do this or that." But perhaps he will not; perhaps he hath determined, in his infinite wiſdom, that the continuance of life, the engaging in this or that project, or the attainment of proſperity, ſhall not be granted us, as being inconſiſtent with our nobler and more durable intereſt. On the other hand, peradventure he may grant us our humble requeſt, provided we addreſs him in the manner we ought, and are faithful to our own duty. To him, however, we muſt leave the event, in whoſe hands we are always ſafe, and who will certainly, unleſs we forfeit his friendſhip, diſpoſe of our affairs for the beſt.

Hope, as I obſerved before, we are doubtleſs allowed to entertain; and ſecond cauſes, though we muſt always acknowledge them to be at his immediate diſpoſal, have a natural operation by his original appointment.

It

It is lawful, it is neceſſary, it is our duty to employ them; and without this, we tempt our Maker. The ſick ſhould, beyond queſtion, uſe medicines; but ſhould not imitate the impiety of King Aſa, who, in his diſeaſe, ſought not to the Lord, but merely to the phyſicians. The neceſſitous ſhould uſe labour, frugality, and contrivance; but they ſhould not make Gods of the ſecond cauſes which they employ; they ſhould not, according to the Prophet's expreſſion, "ſacrifice unto their net, and burn "incenſe unto their drag." We ſhould ſo practiſe the will, and depend upon the providence of our heavenly Father, that whatever events may befall us, we may ſtill have reaſon to be cheerful. It will then be our privilege, as well as our duty, to adopt the pious and ſublime language of the Prophet already cited: "Although "the fig-tree ſhall not bloſom, neither "ſhall fruit be in the vines, the labour "of the olive ſhall fail, and the fields "ſhall yield no meat; the flock ſhall be "cut off from the fold, and there ſhall be "no herd in the ſtalls; yet I will rejoice

"in

" in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my " ſalvation."

Let us now proceed to the reaſons advanced by the holy Apoſtle in oppoſition to ſinful confidence; the firſt of which is our general ignorance of future events. " Ye " know not what ſhall be on the morrow." When we conſider things paſt and preſent as the objects of our diſquiſitions, we muſt own that human knowledge is wonderfully various and extenſive. Nay, when we attend to future events, ſo far as probability is concerned, it cannot be denied that men, and eſpecially ſome men, are endowed by providence with a ſurprizing ſagacity of conjecture. But we are now ſpeaking, not of conjecture, but of knowledge, certain knowledge of future events; of which the human race is totally deſtitute, except ſo far as futurity is revealed. You think it perhaps no wonder that man ſhould be ignorant of thoſe various incidents, which may happen a thouſand years hence. But the Apoſtle hath aſſured you of what is much more remarkable; he declares that you

you are ignorant of what may happen the very next day, and indeed he might have ſaid, the very next moment.

Be it now decided by any perſon of common reflection, whether the confidence of man, with regard to future events of a temporal kind, be not extremely abſurd, contemptible, and ridiculous, not to ſay ſinful. In his wonderful wiſdom he plans his ſchemes, rejoices in the proſpect of this or that acquiſition, and triumphs in the thought how much happier he ſhall be the next year than the laſt. But the next year, with all it's ſpecious and flattering promiſes, as it frequently happens, is a worſe deceiver than the former. Events are concealed behind the veil of futurity, and when time wears through the thick covering, how different, how contrary do they often prove to the fond expectation of man!

Is it ſo determined? Will you certainly travel to ſuch a city? Are you bent upon reſiding there no leſs than a year, carrying on commerce with the utmoſt ardour, and growing

growing expeditiouſly rich? I take it for granted then that you are endued with a foreknowledge, which is quite abſolute and infallible, that you ſhall meet with no accident upon the journey, that your health will be continued, that no diſappointment ſhall come acroſs you, but that every thing ſhall be anſwerable to your warmeſt wiſhes. Of all theſe particulars you are certainly aſſured beyond a poſſibility of miſtake. It cannot be otherwiſe; for, being a reaſonable creature, you would never be ſecure where there is a poſſibility of danger, and confident of uncertainties. It is the part of reaſon always to believe in proportion to evidence, and never to be ſanguine on ſlight and trivial probabilities. So that if you are not infallible with all this confidence about you—it is a coarſe expreſſion, but an honeſt and friendly truth—you are no better than mad.

The next argument againſt human preſumption advanced by the Apoſtle, is taken from the frailty and inſtability of human life. "For what is your life? It is even "a vapour

"a vapour that appeareth for a little time, "and then vaniſheth away." Our preſent exiſtence is ſometimes compared to a flower, and ſometimes to a ſhadow; but in this paſſage to a vapour; a moſt fleeting and unſubſtantial object, and every moment at the mercy of the wind and ſun! Behold here the foundation of our moſt towering hopes. Were the materials ever ſo durable or certain, obſerve upon what a baſis they are erected! They are built only upon a vapour. Were there no deluſion, no precarioufneſs, no inſtability in outward things, yet, life itſelf being at beſt ſo airy, what room is there left for confidence? Surely, whoever conſiders the frailty of his own frame, the diſeaſes to which he is liable, and the accidents to which he is expoſed; will readily acknowledge that the compariſon of life to a vapour is not unworthy of an Apoſtle.

"Thou haſt goods laid up for many "years," ſays the man in the parable already cited. "This enſuing year", ſays another of the ſame diſpoſition, "I have

"many projects to execute, which will "turn out much to my benefit; and then "what a figure ſhall I be enabled to make, "and what a multitude of pleaſures to en-"joy!" But perhaps the deciſion of God, in his ſecret counſels, may be far different. "Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be "required of thee; and then whoſe ſhall "theſe things be thou poſſeſſeſt," or thoſe thou hopeſt to poſſeſs?

This leads me to obſerve the laſt argument which the Apoſtle intimates; that the affairs in which we engage, our lives themſelves, and all the events which concern them, are abſolutely at God's diſpoſal. "Ye "ought to ſay, If the Lord will, we ſhall "live, and do this or that." The whole therefore depends on the deciſion of the divine will. It is a doctrine of revelation, and ſo far as I can diſcover, of revelation merely, that God governs the world not only by the general laws which he at firſt eſtabliſhed, but by particular interpoſures of providence. How far a general may be ſo contrived as to anſwer the purpoſes of a

particular providence, it is not for us with certainty to determine; though we may naturally enough conjecture in a variety of caſes and inſtances. Nor yet are we ſure, in particular caſes, whether God has interpoſed by a poſitive exertion of ſubordinate and ſecondary cauſes. But the fact at large, namely, that God governs the world by a particular providence, though not by viſible miracles, as in antient times, is plain from the New Teſtament. The declaration to this purpoſe, that "a ſparrow falls not to "the ground without our heavenly Father, "and that the very hairs of our heads are "all numbered;" the prayers we are directed to offer for our daily bread; the ſupplications for the ſafety of ourſelves and others; and the thankſgiving for deliverances and every mercy—theſe are clear declarations of a particular providence, which no perſon living, who believes the New Teſtament, can poſſibly diſpute. Nay, they are declarations, that this particular providence is concerned, not only for communities, but for individuals, not only for public and more important characters, but

for the meaneſt and moſt private of the human race.

Will you now aſk, why an all-perfect Being did not provide for every circumſtance and want of man, and every variation of his conduct, by the firſt and general eſtabliſhment of things? Suppoſe I were to anſwer that I am incapable of aſſigning the reaſon? Will you therefpre deny the fact, and diſbelieve a particular providence, which is far from being abſurd in itſelf, and ſo clearly revealed in ſcripture? This were abſurd indeed. But the truth is, that we can aſſign one reaſon, which appears very ſatisfactory, and diſcovers the wiſdom, and at the ſame time the goodneſs of God. A particular providence, or a ſcheme of particular interpoſures, draws cloſer the knot of our dependence, and is more calculated to affect us with devotion than an invariable original plan. Were we ſolely to depend upon a chain of cauſes and effects, eſtabliſhed almoſt ſix thouſand years ago, altho' God eſtabliſhed it, we ſhould be apt to forget the artificer. Had we nothing to

hope

hope or fear in this world, but from ſecond cauſes and our own conduct, though ſuch cauſes were firſt ſet to work by the ſupreme Being, and though from him we derived our capacities of conduct, we ſhould ſeldom remember him. The original appointment of cauſes and effects would be too far backward, and the future judgment would be imagined too far forward, to be often conſidered by the unthinking children of men. But at preſent the caſe is far different. Now, that God immediately interpoſes, or, at leaſt, gives a different impulſe or direction to ſecondary agents; and that we find it neceſſary to deprecate judgments, and petition for bleſſings at the throne of grace, we ſee more clearly, and feel with greater force the abſolute neceſſity of religion. Take away a particular providence, and there will be little need of petitions. Take away the neceſſity of petitions, and you remove one of the ſtrongeſt pillars which ſupport the fabric of religion.

Again; will you contend that it is not probable the Deity ſhould regard the parti-

cular concerns of ſuch numerous individuals, and therefore, that the doctrine of a particular providence is hard to be credited? Here, as in the former caſe, we might once more appeal to the authority of revelation. But as far as reaſon can go, let reaſon and revelation go hand in hand. Why then do you think it incredible that God ſhould attend to the particular concerns of ſuch numerous individuals? Is it beneath the auguſt majeſty of ſuch a Being? But, you acknowledge, it was not beneath him to create thoſe individuals; he is perfectly good, and, ſurely, it well becomes him to govern them by thoſe methods which are moſt effectual to render them religious. Or, do you really imagine that there is any diſtraction in attending ſuch numerous concerns? But conſider of whom we are ſpeaking. Remember, it is of that Being, whoſe knowledge is unbounded, whoſe power is infinite; who originally planned and executed this ſtupendous frame of the univerſe, which will probably furniſh new ſubjects of contemplation and aſtoniſhment even to angels through all eternity. When

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we take upon us to reaſon of God, let us not aſcribe to him our own weakneſſes, nor deceive our own minds, by vainly conveying ourſelves into the place of a perfect and all-powerful Being. To him who was capable of creating the univerſe, nothing is impoſſible which implies no contradiction, and nothing is difficult which is not impoſſible.

*Finally*; The inviſibility of a particular providence can be no objection againſt it. The apparent courſe of nature muſt not be confounded, or elſe we could have no dependence upon any cauſe or effect: Many other facts are real which are not viſible: Viſible interpoſures would not differ from real miracles: Inviſible interpoſures anſwer their purpoſe, and their reality is ſufficiently proved by the authority of the Chriſtian ſcheme.

Theſe remarks might not be quite uſeleſs if enlarged; but I ſhall only infer from them on this occaſion, that if our undertakings, our very lives, and all the events in which our

our lives are concerned, are abſolutely at the diſpoſal of that Being, who governs the world by a particular providence, our ſanguine confidence in ſuch a ſtate, while God is left out of our view, muſt be extremely impious. It is very fooliſh, at the loweſt, as ariſing from an inconſiderate temper. It is ſhockingly and moſt abſurdly proud, if it ſpring from the imagination that we are able to control events. But when we ſee that our lives and affairs are abſolutely at God's diſpoſal, we muſt then acknowledge that it is horrid ingratitude to our beſt benefactor, and an inſult to the Governor of the world. With great propriety therefore does the Apoſtle declare, "Ye rejoice in your boaſtings: All ſuch "rejoicing is evil."

I ſhall juſt obſerve farther, that this preſumption is evil not only in itſelf, but likewiſe in the effects which it produces. A dependence upon God is a check upon our minds, and reſtrains us from unlawful deſigns; and it likewiſe renders us careful to pleaſe, in all our actions, that perfect Being to

to whom we pray for ſucceſs. But both theſe checks are taken off by ſelf-confidence and preſumption, which looſen us from God, and madly abandon us to our own paſſions and deſires. Such rejoicing therefore is manifeſtly evil both in it's beginning and end.

If then our lives and affairs are thus at the diſpoſal of God, let us duly thank him for his paſt protection and every comfort which we have enjoyed. We have now, through the favour of his kind providence, paſſed ſafely through another year, and experienced a variety of mercies. We ſhould ſeriouſly recollect them in the calm of retirement; and if we really recollect them in the manner we ought, we ſhall do it with the livelieſt gratitude. Perhaps too we have been exerciſed with diſappointments and trials, the common allotment of humanity; but even theſe have been deſigned for our good. Let us rightly improve them. It is as much an iniquity not to improve affliction, as it is to be negligent of mercies. Afflictions, when properly

properly conſidered, are themſelves among the number of mercies. In every reſpect, let our lives, as well as our lips, habitually expreſs that we are ſenſible of divine goodneſs—that goodneſs, which, when only extended to us for a ſingle day, is a great obligation; but, continued for years, ſhould immoveably bind us to the ſervice of our great Benefactor.

*Finally*; Let us cheriſh ſuch a temper, and obſerve ſuch a conduct during the remainder of life, as to have reaſon for depending on his future bleſſing and protection. Let us ſhew our dependence in all our concerns, and in the practice of our duty. It is not the celebration of a commencing year, it is not the uſe of a few ſerious expreſſions, that will anſwer the purpoſe. Let us truly repent of our paſt ſins, let us guard againſt them as the worſt of evils, let us live the praiſes of our beſt protector and friend; and then, whatever betide us, we are ſafe. Let this year be a year of wiſdom, piety, and virtue; and then, if we live ſo long, it will certainly be

be a year of happineſs. How long our lives may be continued, or what events may await us, is known only to God. It is his part to govern—it is our's to ſubmit and obey.

SERMON

# SERMON XIV.

## ON THE TREACHERY OF WORLDLY FRIENDSHIP.

JOB xix. 13, 14.

HE HATH PUT MY BRETHREN FAR FROM ME, AND MY ACQUAINTANCE ARE VERILY ESTRANGED FROM ME. MY KINSFOLK HAVE FAILED, AND MY FAMILIAR FRIENDS HAVE FORGOTTEN ME.

MOST unhappy Job! Not only precipitated from the ſummit of proſperity to the depth of adverſity, but exerciſed with almoſt every ſpecies of trouble that the preſent ſtate could admit! His great wealth ſuddenly raviſhed from him:—All his children inſtantaneouſly deſtroyed, and deſtroyed in the hour of feſtivity:—His body viſited with the moſt excruciating diſorders:—His reputation wounded by thoſe who ought to have defended it:—His domeſtic ſervants treating him in the moſt indignant manner—and the very partner of his bed growing indifferent to him, lothing him, and even tempting him to extreme impiety. Moſt unhappy Job! Affliction ſeems to have

enptied on thee his quiver, even to the laſt arow. Well mighteſt thou ſay of the ſupreme Manager, though with an impatence not quite excuſable: "His troops "come together, and raiſe up their way "againſt me, and encamp round about my "tabernacle." However indifferent thy cotemporaries were to thy ſufferings, we gidge thee not the friendly tear, but feel f thee the moſt painful ſympathy, at the dance of more than three thouſand years.

It was not the ſmalleſt of Job's cala-ities, that as ſome, from whom he might ve expected better things, viſited and in-fted him; ſo others, by a ſtrange repulſive fce which there is in adverſity, totally ſſook him. "He hath put my brethren "ar from me, and mine acquaintance are "erily eſtranged from me. My kinsfolk "ave failed, and my familiar friends have "orgotten me." God is here ſaid to have t his brethren far from him. A very ual mode of ſpeech among the oriental nions. Not that the Deity can, ſtrictly aking, be the author of unkindneſs and perfidy;

perfidy; but when ſuch things happen in conſequence of his diſpoſals, as here particularly in conſequence of affliction, the event is ſaid to have been produced by God himſelf. Thus in the New Teſtament: "I am come, ſays our Lord, to ſet a man "at variance againſt his father, and the "daughter againſt her mother, &c."— meaning, that this would be the effect of the prejudices againſt his religion.

The text was recommended to me for the preſent occaſion in conſequence of the deſire of a perſon lately deceaſed. He ſeemed for a conſiderable time to be concerned for his future happineſs; greatly condemned his paſt life; blamed himſelf for the remaining habits of ſin; was intent on partaking the holy ſupper, not as if that alone were ſufficient to ſalvation, but as matter of duty; and appeared deeply ſenſible of the vanity of human life, and particularly, as is manifeſt by his choice of this text, the vanity of worldly friendſhip. What reaſon he had to lament the deſertion and perfidy of former friends, I am neither able nor concerned

to

to determine. I ſhall only endeavour to raiſe improvement from this paſſage of holy writ, by making on it ſuch obſervations as may be uſeful to all; but eſpecially to the young, the unexperienced, and the diſſolute, if any of the laſt character ſhould now hear me. The text, as choſen by the deceaſed, may be conſidered as the declaration of a dying man concerning the vanity and perfidiouſneſs of worldly friendſhip; or of all connections to which men are prompted by worldly and ſelfiſh motives, and by which therefore the ſacred name of friendſhip is moſt unjuſtly uſurped.

In this light the ſubject may be hoped to make the greater impreſſion: Treating it therefore at large, for general uſe, I ſhall conſider the inſtability and deceitfulneſs of worldly friendſhip, as founded on relation, on intereſt, and on gaiety, mirth, and pleaſure.

The deceitfulneſs of friendſhip founded on relation ought not to be omitted, being expreſsly mentioned by Job in the text: "He

" He hath put my brethren far from me; " my kinsfolk have failed." The God of nature hath indeed implanted a peculiar and mutual affection in thoſe of the ſame blood, which very frequently operates, and produces kind actions, where the heart is totally deſtitute of every other good principle. But this affection is too often overborne by the torrent of vicious habits; controlled by baſe ſuſpicion, by ſcandalous ſelf-intereſt and avarice, by ill-grounded and furious reſentment; nay, even extinguiſhed, and ſucceeded by ſuch peculiar and inveterate malevolence, that thoſe words of ſcripture are eminently verified: " A man's foes"—his moſt implacable foes—" ſhall be they of his " own houſhold."

But ſuppoſe relative affection ſhould not meet with a heart ſo enormouſly corrupted as to be expelled thence, and ſucceeded by hatred and malice; it is not unfrequently, and eſpecially in the ſeaſon of affliction, chilled by unfeeling ſelfiſhneſs, and frozen into abſolute indifference. In that caſe one relation hath no more ſympathy with the

diſtreſs of another, whatever maſk of friendſhip he may have worn before, than he has with the ſufferings of the vileſt among the brute creation.

This is that world—a world capable of producing, nay, abounding with ſuch examples—of which we are ſo inordinately fond as to be forgetful of heaven; and by which we are ſo ſhamefully deluded as to neglect a preparation for death. Were all of the character now deſcribed, life would be abſolutely inſupportable, and death, abſtracted from a future ſtate, an object of extreme deſire.

In two words, our expectations of ſolid friendſhip, even from relative affection, may grievouſly diſappoint us, unleſs that affection have for it's foundation a principle of true goodneſs. "Whoſoever" ſaith our Lord, "ſhall do the will of my Father which is "in heaven, the ſame is my brother and "ſiſter and mother."

Equally, nay, ſtill more precarious and unſtable is worldly friendſhip founded on mere

mere intereſt. "Mine acquaintance are "verily eſtranged from me, and my familiar "friends have forgotten me." This truth is ſo obvious to reaſon, and ſo agreeable to experience, that all nations, in every age, have either by ſpeech or writing borne witneſs to it. To omit others, how ſtrong and pathetic are the complaints of the Pſalmiſt upon this head! "An evil diſeaſe, ſay they, "cleaveth faſt unto him; and now that he "lieth, he ſhall riſe up no more. Yea, "mine own familiar friend, in whom I "truſted, which did eat of my bread, hath "lift up his heel againſt me." Thus again in another place: "It was not an enemy "that reproached me; then I could have "borne it: Neither was it he that hated "me,"—that is, profeſſedly hated me— "who did magnify himſelf againſt me; then "I would have hid myſelf from him;"— the open hoſtility of ſuch a perſon would have put me upon my guard:—"But it was "thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and "mine acquaintance. We took ſweet coun- "ſel together, and walked to the houſe of "God in company." We ſee that preten-

ſions to religion may not only be inſincere, but may admit of equal unfaithfulneſs both to God and man; though real piety, in the mean while, is in every reſpect the ſtrongeſt guard of ſincerity. It does not appear indeed that this laſt perſon mentioned by David had expectations of intereſt from him; but the caſes are ſo near akin, this man had ſuch an attachment to the proſperity of the Pſalmiſt, and ſo deſpiſed him in his adverſity and ſickneſs, that his conduct was well worthy of remark under this diviſion of the ſubject.

The ſame obſervation may be extended to Job's friends who are interlocutors in the dialogue exhibited to us in this ancient book. Although they were good men upon the whole, and of ſuch rank and circumſtances as to have no intereſted dependence on their friend in his proſperity, yet that proſperity had too much influenced their ideas of his character; for as ſoon as he is deprived of his health and ſubſtance, they immediately pronounce him an enemy to God and goodneſs. "All my inward

"friends,

"friends," ſays the afflicted good man, "abhorred me; and they whom I loved are "turned againſt me." Who can obſerve the anguiſh of his addreſs to them in the next verſe but one, and withhold the ſtarting tear? "Have pity upon me, have pity "upon me, O ye my friends! for the hand "of God hath touched me."

In the mean while, thoſe pretended friendſhips which are ſtrictly intereſted, or erected on mere mercenary dependence, muſt generally diſappoint us; and therefore ſhould be very cautiouſly truſted, and regarded with a jealous eye. Remove the foundation, and the building will neceſſarily fall.

Thoſe nominal friendſhips likewiſe, which are founded on mirth and pleaſure, are at leaſt equally precarious. They who are endued with the powers of pleaſantry, and with ſuch a redundance of ſpirits as gives life to all they ſpeak; whoſe every look is humour, and every action mimicry, are ſure of admirers and oſtenſible friends, are wel-

come to every table, are the delight of almoſt every ſociety, and equally careſſed both by the gay and great: Theſe connections, they imagine, are ſo ſolid; this life is ſo exquiſitely pleaſing, eſpecially when heightened by the charms of luxury, and too often with the ſeaſoning of lewdneſs and extreme intemperance; that they can hardly perſuade themſelves they will ever come to an end. But alas! is this,—eſpecially when we totally devote ourſelves to it, and ſacrifice to it all or moſt of our time,—is this the truly happy life? As far from it as poſſible. If we would really enjoy our exiſtence as rational beings, and eſtabliſh laſting and deſirable connections, we muſt form in ourſelves, and ſeek in others, qualities much more ſubſtantial and uſeful than theſe; qualities which will abide by us in every ſcene of life, will gain us the applauſe of the wiſe and good, and even the approbation of ſuperior beings. For though reaſonable cheerfulneſs is allowed by religion, is a very recommending habit to all but the moroſe and ſplenetic, and throws a luſtre on more ſolid accompliſhments; yet we may ſay of

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it when exceſſive with Solomon: "I ſaid "of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, "What doeth it?" Whatever elſe it may do, we are certain it very ſeldom eſtabliſhes and cements a durable friendſhip. The wiſe man had juſt before informed us: "I "ſaid in mine heart, Go to now; I will "prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy "pleaſure: And behold, this alſo is vanity." To deſcribe extravagant mirth and pleaſure, and all this from his own experience, as uſeleſs, vain, and deluſive, and even frantic, is ſurely condemning them with the greateſt emphaſis and authority.

The young and heedleſs, and indeed too many in the more advanced ſeaſons of life, are apt to place, if not all wiſdom, at leaſt all happineſs, in feſtivity and mirth. There are no entertainments like thoſe of pleaſantry and luxury, nor any companions to be named with the diſſolute and gay; and a conſtant rotation of theſe muſt be ſecured, at the expence at leaſt of wealth, and generally of uſeful and neceſſary engagements. Come on then; let us ſee the conſequence.

I decline inſiſting at preſent on the laſſitude, the diſſatisfaction, the ſelf-condemnation, the ſacrifice of health, the ruin of affairs, which are the uſual concomitants or effects of ſuch a life. Let us only conſider it with regard to friendſhip, the immediate ſubject of our text. Let us ſuppoſe one of theſe ſons of jollity and luxury reduced to affliction of any kind: To whom muſt he fly for ſuccour? To his former gay companions. The laſt men in the world who are diſpoſed to befriend him. For though there may happen to be one among a thouſand of that turn, whoſe generoſity is not altogether ſuffocated by wine and laughter; yet ſuch inſtances are not to be depended on: for the majority of this character are too pleaſurable to be compaſſionate, too extravagant to be liberal, and will fly from melancholy as they would from the infection of a peſtilence.

Let us now ſhift the ſcene, and view this man of gladneſs and vivacity labouring under the weight of diſeaſe—his body pained and

and emaciated—his ſpirits dejected—his conſcience alarmed—his joy turned into mourning—and his ſongs into ſighs and groans. If his former aſſociates are of any value, if they can afford him any comfort or ſupport, now is the time for them to ſhew themſelves. Let us imagine for a moment—a ſuppoſition in fact very abſurd—that they actually fly to attend him. But unleſs he ſhould need their charity, which perhaps may not be the caſe, what ſervice can they do him? Will wine reſtore him his health? Will laughter then raiſe his ſpirits? Or will the antic buffoonery of his viſitors calm the convulſions of his troubled conſcience? Or ſhall we imagine theſe firſt-born of mirth turning profeſſors of theology, and with a grave countenance adminiſtring to him religious conſolation? Miſerable comforters, of a truth, would ye be—ſtill more miſerable than thoſe of the unhappy Job! No: whoever in affliction wants advice, aſſiſtance, or conſolation, muſt have recourſe to very different men from theſe; men of talents greatly ſuperior to thoſe of mere pleaſantry, and whoſe com-

forts

ſorts are infinitely more durable than the momentary burſt of laughter.

But the truth is, theſe ſummer friends, like the gaudy and fluttering inſects of a ſeaſon, immediately diſappear at the approach of a cloud, and are never ſeen in the winter of age and ſickneſs. All the attraction by which they were influenced is at an end, dejection takes place of merriment, and they keep at a diſtance. Solomon, if he pleaſe, may ſay that "it is better to go to "the houſe of mourning than the houſe of "feaſting;" but they are of a different opinion, and muſt know better than Solomon. They are afraid of being haunted by that dark ſpectre melancholy; they dread the ſuggeſtion of what may one day be their own caſe; they ſcarcely inquire about their former aſſociate. If by chance they hear of his affliction, they ſhake their heads, drop two words of compaſſion, and go on with their amuſements. They forget him as thoroughly as if he had never exiſted, and, for ought they will do to comfort and ſupport him, he may periſh and rot by himſelf.

Nay,

Nay, we have heard of a gay and luxurious company, who, when one of their number ſuddenly fell down dead, placed his lifeleſs corpſe behind a ſcreen, and as much abandoned themſelves to licentious pleaſure, as if he had died at the diſtance of a thouſand miles, and the interval of a thouſand years.

Such is the friendſhip of the world! Such particularly is a friendſhip eſtabliſhed on gaiety and diſſolute manners! And great reaſon will he who depends upon ſuch friendſhips have to cry out with Job; "Mine "acquaintance are verily eſtranged from "me, and my familiar friends have for-"gotten me."

Entertaining juſt ideas of worldly friendſhips, let us then learn to moderate our dependence on connections which appear to be ſo extremely precarious. I mean ſuch friendſhips as I have already deſcribed; for as to that friendſhip of a nobler ſort, which is rooted in wiſdom and cheriſhed by virtuous affection, this is a plant of ſo tender and ſenſible a nature, that it would droop

and wither under the unkindly influence of ſuſpicion. But with regard to the aſſociations and amities of the former kind, let us never expect from them what common ſenſe and experience have demonſtrated they were never fitted to produce. Reaſon ſhews us that the friendſhip of the world is vanity; and, which is much worſe, a ſacred writer hath aſſured us that it is enmity with God.

Let us not only ſeek but alſo be qualified for that friendſhip which is founded on virtue and religion. If we have only ſuperficial accompliſhments and no ſubſtantial good qualities, the wiſe and virtuous may indeed have compaſſion for us, but can never inwardly eſteem us. In order to produce that refined and exalted friendſhip, which the ancients repreſented as the cordial of life, and a great remedy for human miſeries, there muſt certainly be, on both ſides, wiſdom, rectitude, and goodneſs. The bond muſt be mutual, or elſe it will never hold. And in this view that pleaſant and joyous proſpect will be afforded us, of brethren and friends dwelling together in unity. This bond

bond will be ſo far from being looſened, as rather to be confirmed and tightened by the attacks of ſorrow and affliction.

We learn hence, above all, how requiſite it is to fix our dependence on the friendſhip of the all-perfect Being. "The Lord "is our refuge and ſtrength"—not keeping at a diſtance from us—not eſtranged by our affliction—but "a very preſent help in "trouble." Suppoſe we are deſerted by our earthly friends; God, if we are faithful, will never deſert us. "When my father "and my mother forſake me, then the Lord "will take me up." Suppoſe our earthly friends ever ſo well diſpoſed to ſerve us, Can they ſhield us from death or future ruin?

But God can do every thing for us in time and eternity; can guard our proſperity, ſoothe our affliction, reſtore us from death, and bring us to the regions of perfect, rapturous, and everlaſting friendſhip.

SERMON

# SERMON XV.

## NO HAPPINESS WITHOUT RELIGION.

*PSALM* cxlvi. 5.

HAPPY IS HE THAT HATH THE GOD OF JACOB FOR HIS HELP, WHOSE HOPE IS IN THE LORD HIS GOD.

THE deſire of happineſs, however miſtaken in the means which it employs, or however miſled in the particular choice of the end, is natural to all mankind. Let them differ ever ſo widely in other reſpects, this is the univerſal inquiry which, either by their words or actions, they are conſtantly making, "Who will ſhew us any "good?" There are doubtleſs many valuable comforts ariſing from the preſent world, which may be conſidered as ingredients of our happineſs here; but all of them united cannot afford us contentment, much leſs a complete felicity: Nay, if we conſider and purſue them as our chief good, we ſhall pay for our folly, and find them to be not only vanity, but vexation of ſpirit. It is not merely an expreſſion of courſe, or a bare

cuſtomary

cuſtomary form of ſpeech adopted by ſerious perſons, but a truth founded on the experience of all ages, that the world, unſanctified and unimproved by religion, will be ſo far from making us happy, as actually to make us miſerable. The whole book of Eccleſiaſtes is nothing elſe but a confirmation of this truth; a book written by Solomon, who could make the experiment in a more complete manner than moſt of the human race.

It is not pretended that religious perſons ſhall never be diſappointed or tried with affliction; but only that religion is the greateſt comfort, that it is abſolutely neceſſary to give us contentment, and will yield us as much ſatisfaction as we can poſſibly attain on this ſide the grave. In the mean while, how different is the notion advanced in the text, from that which is commonly entertained! It is not ſaid by the holy Pſalmiſt, Happy is the man who has heaped up wealth, or is riſen to power, or can gratify his ſenſual appetites without control; but, "Happy is he that hath the God

"of

"of Jacob for his help, whoſe hope is in "the Lord his God."

In order to illuſtrate and enforce this truth, I ſhall conſider the character of the perſon who is here declared to be happy; and then endeavour to explain in what manner religion, or confidence in God, tends to produce happineſs.

The perſon who is pronounced in the text to be happy, is he who hath the God of Jacob, the all-perfect and only true God, for his help, whoſe hope is in the Lord his God. In other words, it is he who actually hopes in God, with regard both to time and to eternity, and that upon rational grounds. It is he who, according to the text, hath choſen the Lord for his God. It is he who acts in ſuch a manner, who ſo governs his heart and directs his life, as to have reaſon for confidence in his Maker; or, to expreſs all at once, it is he who is ſincerely religious: For to ſuppoſe that religion would afford happineſs to him who is not religious would be the groſſeſt of all abſurdities.

That the hope of which the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks is a practical hope, or a principle founded on and perfective of true goodneſs, is manifeſt; for he ſays of the ſame perſon who hopes in God, that he actually hath God for his help. Now, no perſon is actually the object of the divine favour and protection, in the higheſt and beſt ſenſe, or ſo as to be really happy, who is not at the ſame time conformable to the divine will. We may hope as ardently as we pleaſe, we may form very ſanguine expectations from God's goodneſs; but unleſs we endeavour to reſemble him, and ſubmit both our hearts and lives to his ſupreme authority, we ſhall find that we have diſhonoured rather than pleaſed him; that we have deſerved his ſeverity and not his favour, and that our hope is no better than preſumption.

It farther appears from a compariſon of the text with the context, that we muſt chooſe God for the object of our confidence preferably to all other beings. "Put not "your truſt in princes, nor in the ſon of "man, in whom there is no help. His "breath

" breath goeth forth, he returneth to his " earth; in that very day his thoughts " periſh. Happy is he that hath the God " of Jacob for his help, whoſe hope is in " the Lord his God." It is not ſignified in this place, or ſimilar paſſages, that we muſt place no degree of dependence upon our fellow-creatures, and particularly upon the princes and rulers of the earth; but only that we ſhould truſt them in ſuch a manner, as to remember that they are fallible and mortal. Our ſupreme confidence muſt be fixed upon that Being whoſe power is almighty, and whoſe veracity is unchangeable; or, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it in the verſe following the text, " who " made heaven and earth, the ſea, and all " that therein is; who keepeth truth for " ever."

It appears then, that unleſs God be the object of our practical and ſupreme dependence, he is not our help, we are not intitled to his favour and protection, and therefore can never be happy. But, on the other ſide, though God were really our

help, though in all other reſpects we were really conformable to the divine will, and actual objects of divine favour; yet, if we did not know it, if through melancholy or miſapprehenſion we enjoyed not a comfortable hope, we ſhould certainly, for the time, be equally far from happineſs. The two clauſes therefore of the Pſalmiſt's aſſertion are very judiciouſly joined together: "Happy is he who hath the God of Jacob "for his help, whoſe hope is in the Lord "his God." The man who hath juſt reaſon for hope, and at the ſame time actually hopes, is happy; as happy, all other things being equal, as a mortal creature can poſſibly be in this uncertain world. Such is the ſtate, and ſuch the privilege of true religion. But if any perſons who are truly religious, enjoy not the comforts to which they are intitled, if they are actually favoured with God's help, and yet are deſtitute of hope, it is generally owing to themſelves: It is for want of correcting thoſe miſapprehenſions by which they are miſled, and becauſe they ſtrive not to ſubdue that unreaſonable melancholy, which, too often,

they

they wilfully indulge. There may indeed be a natural diſpoſition unfavourable to happineſs, which neither the endeavours of the ſufferers themſelves, the principles and advantages of religion, nor the divine aſſiſtance granted them in this life, can ever totally overcome. The caſes of ſuch perſons are only exceptions to the general rule; and they themſelves, (which ſtill ſhews the pre-eminence of religion) ſhall hereafter be admitted to a bleſſed ſtate, where their ſtorms of affliction ſhall be huſhed, and ſucceeded by an eternal calm.

But ſtill the aſſertion of the text, that the natural tendency of practical religion is to render us happy even here in this ſtate of hope, is unqueſtionably true. And if this was the tendency of it under the old diſpenſation, much more is it ſo now under the goſpel œconomy, where the divine promiſes are more explicit, the redemption more largely unfolded, our hopes more firmly eſtabliſhed, our worſhip more ſpiritual, and our advantages greater of every kind to be truly religious, and therefore to

be happy. We ſtill ſerve the God of Abraham, of Iſaac, and of Jacob; but if we approve ourſelves Abraham's children in practical faith and hope, we have a clearer proſpect of the eternal inheritance than was enjoyed even by that patriarch. It is ſaid of Abraham, that he "ſaw Chriſt's day and "rejoiced;" but he ſaw it comparatively overcaſt with clouds: Whereas, upon us the ſun of righteouſneſs is riſen with ſuch ſplendour, that we have better opportunities of being guided by it's light, and warmed with it's genial heat.

I proceed to repreſent in what manner religion, or a practical confidence in the ſupreme Being, tends to produce happineſs in the preſent ſtate; and this it does, in the firſt place, by giving our worldly comforts their greateſt poſſible poignancy and reliſh. Godlineſs hath the promiſe, not only of the future, but likewiſe of the preſent life—not ſurely of perfect or peculiar proſperity, but of certain bleſſings with regard to this tranſitory ſtate, which none but the religious can either expect or enjoy. The

diſpoſition

diſpoſition which religion inſpires, and the prudence and integrity which it teaches, qualify the mind above all other principles, for engaging with ſucceſs in the purſuit even of worldly good. If this happy effect of piety is not always apparent, it is becauſe we are not conſiſtent in our pretences of adhering to it, and do not ſuffer it to exert it's full influence. Again, there is nothing that can add ſuch a reliſh to the good things of life, as the conſideration that they are the gifts and accompanied with the complacency of him, who is our beſt Father and friend, our greateſt benefactor, the diſpoſer of our ſituation, and the fountain of all our hopes. Farther, the thought that he can, and actually will preſerve and increaſe them, if it ſeem beſt to his infinite wiſdom, muſt give us a tranquility in contemplating, and a pleaſure in enjoying them, which otherwiſe we could never obtain. When I reflect that my neareſt friends, and all my valuable comforts are at his diſpoſal, who views me with eſteem, and is promoting my eternal good, I feel a ſerenity amidſt the dangers of life, which can flow from no

other ſource. Add to all this, that thoſe regular appetites which religion controlls, are beſt qualified to enjoy the comforts of life; that the conſciouſneſs of employing them to the divine glory gives them a higher flavour; and laſtly, that our attachment to nobler good, a good which lies not at the mercy of time and chance, renders us more calmly reſigned amidſt the uncertainties of our temporal welfare. There is frequently an uneaſy ſuſpicion, or a painful ſolicitude, to which ſinful minds are ſubject, and which renders them incapable of thoroughly enjoying thoſe worldly comforts which they poſſeſs. They either believe not that the world is governed by a perfect providence; or, if they believe it, it has impreſſed them very ſlightly. They have no reliſh for ſpiritual enjoyments: Earthly poſſeſſions are their chief good, and as this is perpetually in danger, they are generally diſtreſſed, and happy they can never be.

Religion has alſo a tendency to render mankind happy by turning afflictions into bleſſings.

bleſſings. Severe trials are intolerable to all but good perſons; unleſs indeed the ſufferers are infatuated, and then, ſurely, they are not to be envied. But the truly devout, who fix upon the ſupreme Being a practical confidence, have the aſſurance given them not only that no temptation ſhall befal them but ſuch as is common to man, and that God's ſtrength ſhall be made perfect in their weakneſs, but likewiſe, that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love God, and are cheerfully obedient to the calls of his holy goſpel.

It is ſurely a melancholy proſpect which the ſinner hath before him, when the face of heaven is overſpread with clouds, or when providence frowns upon him. Where ſhall he have recourſe? To the world? The very condition in which we ſuppoſe him placed is a cruel proof that the world is an uncertain ſupport. Shall he go to the Governour of the world, and make him the object of his confidence? Alas! him he hath neglected, him he hath offended and provoked through the whole tenour of his life.

life. Indeed if his afflictions ſhould be ſanctified to work his converſion, it were unſpeakably happy. But this is too ſeldom the caſe. He muſt therefore be ſubject to anguiſh without relief, to fear without hope, and to melancholy which may end, as we have often ſeen, in the moſt deſperate reſolutions. "Happy is he that hath the "God of Jacob for his help, whoſe hope is "in the Lord his God."

He, who is truly and properly dependent upon the beſt of beings, is not only aſſured by promiſe, but finds by experience, that afflictions moderate his worldly deſires, teach him the neceſſity of relying upon God, increaſe his value for virtuous and religious pleaſures, and render him more active in preparing for perfect happineſs. He knows and feels that the divine grace is ſufficient for him, and therefore his afflictions are tolerable. He is ſatisfied of his title to eternal glory, and therefore are they tolerable. But they are much more than tolerable; they are certain bleſſings, and are even a neceſſary ingredient in his happineſs.

neſs. Inſtead of driving him into outrageous iniquities, which is too often their effect upon ſinful minds, they teach him humility, and, in another world, will be the cauſe of his eternal thankfulneſs. Wondrous effect of genuine religion! on account of which we may juſtly compare it to that boaſted ſecret, which converts all metals into gold.

Religion likewiſe tends to our happineſs, as it beſt enables us to regulate thoſe appetites and paſſions, which are the ſources of the greateſt miſery. All our vices are followed by uneaſineſs and ſufferings whether nearer or more diſtant in their train; all our inclinations, when irregular and extravagant, lead us to inconvenience and miſery. But there are ſome of our ſinful paſſions, which are ever attended with unavoidable and immediate anguiſh. Of this kind are, anger and malice, envy and pride, which are always in ſome meaſure their own puniſhment, ſometimes end in our deſtruction here, and fill us with the apprehenſion of more dreadful ſufferings hereafter. We

may

may form a judgment of the pernicious nature of theſe paſſions from the high value the wiſe man hath ſet upon the conqueſt of them, which he emphatically prefers to all other acquiſitions and all other glory. "He "that is ſlow to anger is better than the "mighty, and he that ruleth his own ſpirit, "than he that taketh a city." Real religion, where it effectually prevails, enables us to obtain this glorious conqueſt, delivers us by that means from the worſt miſeries which we can endure in this world, and therefore eminently promotes our happineſs. It gives us for this purpoſe the beſt precepts and directions, ſets before us the moſt attractive examples, lays upon our paſſions the moſt powerful reſtraints, and guides us to the beſt aſſiſtance. Nothing can be more prevailing than the great ſcheme of redemption, conſidered in every view, to mortify in our hearts thoſe outrageous emotions, and fill us with ſerenity and peace. This effect of religion, except only that it is gradual, may be compared to that miracle of our bleſſed Saviour, when he quieted by a command the tumult of the

winds and waves. Indeed the reſemblance of the two operations is ſufficiently intimated by the declaration of God himſelf: "There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the "wicked, who are like the troubled ſea "when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt "up mire and dirt." What a tumult takes place in the mind of the ſinner, who is diſturbed and made miſerable by almoſt every object around him, like the ſea which lies at the mercy of every driving gale! But the good man, in proportion to the degree of goodneſs he hath been able to attain, is calm and unruffled, ſelf-poſſeſſed, and ſelf-governed, uniformly the ſame in every circumſtance, joyfully conſcious of his own integrity, and triumphantly looking for eternal happineſs in ſpite of every event.

The ſame reaſoning is applicable to the appetites, to unſanctified fear, to ungoverned ſorrow, and to every other emotion or habit which diſturbs our peace, and is happily ſubdued by religion. Bleſſed religion! ſo highly beneficent to human nature, ſo valuable though deſpiſed, and, tho' ſcorned

ſcorned and inſulted, ſo productive of peace and joy!

Religion alſo promotes human felicity, by giving us the pleaſures of conſcious goodneſs, and the immediate ſatisfaction of every virtuous and devout act. Every endeavour to regulate our paſſions, every office of beneficence and love, every meditation upon divine things, and every view which is taken by faith of future glory and felicity, affords a pleaſure in the following recollection, as well as in the immediate act. In keeping God's commandments there is great and immediate reward. It not only prepares us for the enjoyment of heaven, but gives us in ſome meaſure a foretaſte of that bleſſed ſtate. How indeed can it be otherwiſe, when heaven itſelf is but a ſtate of more perfect virtue and devotion, of nearer intercourſe with the beſt of beings, and of ſpiritual ſatisfactions infinitely more valuable than the ſplendour of place and ſtation?

The favour of divine aſſiſtance is another advantage which religion gives to happineſs,

neſs. How requiſite is this in a ſtate of proſperity, to keep us moderate and humble! How needful in adverſity, to ſupport us under every preſſure! How uſeful to preſerve us even from unreaſonable fear; and how indiſpenſibly requiſite for the conqueſt of ſin, the reſiſting temptation, the attainment of virtue and real piety, and the improvement of our ſouls in every thing good and godlike!

*Laſtly*; Religion opens to us the proſpect not only of pardon for all our ſins, but of endleſs felicity and glory. Unſupported by the expectation of pardon, a thinking mind, conſcious of it's own unworthineſs and guilt, would be utterly incapable of all happineſs. Unbleſt with the proſpect of a happy exiſtence after death, it could have no reliſh of any enjoyment here. To want of reflection alone it is owing, that multitudes can for ſome time remain eaſy and unconcerned without any evidence either of future felicity or pardon. I ſay for ſome time; ſince ſeaſons doubtleſs there are, when the giddy tumult of diſſipation has for a while

while ſubſided, or when ſickneſs or affliction coarſely intrude, and, as it were, croud upon them—ſuch ſeaſons there are, when the moſt thoughtleſs minds are diſtreſſed with fear, and with anguiſh expect that their ſouls ſhall be annihilated or tormented in a future ſtate. In ſuch ſeaſons, however they may ſtrive to avoid it,

——————————"That fear
"Comes thund'ring back with dreadful revolution
"On their defenceleſs heads."

From ſuch horrours nothing can deliver us but rational and vital religion. Nothing can afford us a permanent pleaſure, or even a tolerable degree of ſerenity and peace, but a practical confidence in God. When we are reaſonably aſſured that he is reconciled to us through his bleſſed Son; and diſcern our title by his grace to eternal happineſs and glory, we may ſubmit with patience to every trial, oppoſe fortitude to every danger, and rejoice in the deepeſt gloom of affliction. The aſſurance of living for ever beyond the grave; the expectation that our bodies ſhall be raiſed incorruptible and glorious;

glorious; that our ſouls ſhall be perfect with regard to their faculties, and pure in all their affections; that we ſhall claſp, with unfleeting delight, thoſe virtuous friends whom we moſt loved upon earth; that we ſhall enjoy the ſociety of angels and ſaints, and the neareſt intercourſe with the eternal and all-adorable excellence:—ſurely theſe expectations form the greateſt happineſs which can poſſibly fill a human breaſt. Such then is the influence of genuine religion upon the welfare of mankind.

In order properly to improve this ſubject, let us endeavour, in the firſt place, to ſtrengthen our belief of the rational principles of religion. By a ſerious, impartial, and frequent meditation upon that evidence by which the truth of religion is aſcertained and confirmed, let us improve our faith, and by that means our happineſs. If our apprehenſion of religious truth be indiſtinct, or our acquaintance with it's proofs greatly deficient, it can yield us but little ſatisfaction.

Let all religious perſons be uniformly ſuch, in order by their ſerenity and habitual cheerfulneſs to recommend their ſacred profeſſion. If they are anxious, notwithſtanding their pretended hopes, if they are terrified at ſlight dangers, and overwhelmed with trifling calamities, the world will imagine that religion is all an impoſture, and that the promiſes it makes of happineſs are mere ſhow and deluſion. Meanwhile, the fault in ſuch caſes is not in religion, but in thoſe who profeſs it. They are not uniformly and conſiſtently ſincere, they are not watchful againſt temptation, they wound their conſciences, ſpoil their own happineſs, and ſuffer not their principles to produce all their effect. In that caſe they are not the perſons who are qualified to recommend religion to the admiration of a ſurrounding world.

*Finally*; Let ſinners reflect, that refuſing to be religious, they only refuſe to be happy. It ſeems then you have no need of God for your help. You can live without hope, and chooſe to be miſerable. If indeed

indeed you are not to be influenced by the proſpect of happineſs, all argument and perſuaſion muſt be at an end. It is a terrible reflection—but you muſt be left to your own choice. You are determined upon miſery, and miſery you muſt have. But remember, whatever agonies you have ſuffered here, when you come to another world you will be convinced, that, in the preſent ſtate, you knew not what miſery meant.

# SERMON XVI.

## ON THE DIVINE GOODNESS TO THE UNTHANKFUL.

*LUKE* vi. 35.

HE IS KIND UNTO THE UNTHANKFUL AND TO THE EVIL.

THERE is no contemplation ſo inſtructive to the mind, or ſo improving and elevating to the heart, as that of the divine perfections. When we look upon other objects, and have examined them attentively for a conſiderable time, however excellent they appeared at firſt, or with whatever eſteem, wonder, or joy they affected us, they become at length familiar, if not tireſome; and having already diſplayed all their charms, are now ranked among things comparatively indifferent. This, I acknowledge, is in ſome degree owing to the reſtleſs nature and inſatiable curioſity of the mind; yet it alſo ariſes in a great meaſure from the imperfection of objects themſelves. But it is far otherwiſe with regard to the all-perfect Ex-

cellence, the Origin of what is great and good. The glories of his nature will yield us the wideſt ſcope. The more we know of his matchleſs nature, the more we diſcover our ignorance. We ſee him upon earth only by a kind of twilight; but ſhall find, even in the heavenly world, the region of unobſtructed light, that he is ſtill greater, wiſer, and more amiable, than we can diſtinctly apprehend. We diſcover enough of the Deity to prevent our aſcribing to him any thing unjuſt or unlovely; but neither we, nor angels, are able thoroughly to comprehend him. It will be one principal part of our buſineſs in the future ſtate, to grow in our acquaintance with this glorious Being, who can exhibit to us new graces, and perhaps new kinds of adorable excellence throughout all eternity.

In the mean while there is no view of the Deity ſo affecting as that of his goodneſs. His other attributes, beyond queſtion, ſhould have their effect upon our hearts, and, duly conſidered, will make ſome ſort of impreſſion upon us almoſt in ſpite of ourſelves.

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We admire his wiſdom, we are aſtoniſhed at his power, we revere his juſtice: But fixing our thoughts upon his goodneſs, we are compelled to a degree of engaging devotional love; and, were it not for the encumbrance of theſe corporeal frames, ſhould be affected up to tranſport. Goodneſs, if I may ſo expreſs it, is the quinteſſence of all excellent qualities. It is repreſented as eminently the glory of the Moſt High. It is that perfection, which, above all others, wins and ſubdues our hearts, binds us as it were to God, and, if rightly attended to, would diſtreſs the moſt profligate ſinner with abhorrence of his own guilt.

Among us it is juſtly eſteemed highly amiable to beſtow favours, ſo far as prudence will allow, without intereſt, or without the proſpect of any return but thanks. It is greater kindneſs ſtill to oblige thoſe who are thankleſs and inſenſible, and receive our benefits, it may be, with leſs marks of complacency than even ſome brutes. But to gratify, though ſtill within the bounds of reaſon, the affronting and the injurious,

and creatures of ſo malignant a heart, that the more they are obliged the more they improve in inſolence,—this is the very ſummit of benevolence. Such benevolence, which yet it were improper to continue beyond our ſtate of trial, is the ſupreme honour of the Deity. He is kind, not to the unthankful only, or to thoſe who neglect him and receive his gifts with the ſame ſenſibility as a clod of earth does the rain, but alſo to the evil, to thoſe who trample upon his laws, and ſtudiouſly apply his bounties in ſuch a manner, as if they deſigned to diſhonour his holineſs and affront his government.

Our Lord in his divine ſermon introduces the text with the following ſentiments: "If "ye love them which love you, what thank "have ye? For ſinners alſo love thoſe that "love them. And if ye do good to them "which do good to you, what thank have "ye? For ſinners alſo do even the ſame. "And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope "to receive, what thank have ye? For "ſinners alſo lend to ſinners, to receive as "much again." We may here obſerve in paſſing,

paſſing, that as Chriſtianity is not inconſiſtent with common ſenſe, we may aſſure ourſelves that we are not in theſe paſſages required to ſquander away our ſubſtance upon the indolent, the worthleſs, and the extravagant, and thus to encourage the greateſt plagues of ſociety; nor to indulge that fooliſh eaſineſs and good-nature, nor practiſe that mad prodigality and profuſeneſs, which are very immodeſt in aſſuming the name of goodneſs, and ſhould be ranked among real vices. Juſtice ſurely ought to take place of charity; and the admonition here actually given is this, That ſo far as we may conſiſtently with ſafety, prudence, and juſtice, we ſhould be ready to deny ourſelves, and to run ſome hazard for the ſake of relieving want. Our Lord proceeds: "But love ye your ene-"mies,"—that is, with a love of benevolence and good-will, for they cannot be objects of eſteem;—"Love ye your enemies, "and do good and lend, hoping for no-"thing again, and your reward ſhall be "great, and ye ſhall be the children of the "Higheſt." Then comes the text: "For

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"he is kind unto the unthankful and to "the evil."

In farther treating this ſubject I ſhall endeavour to repreſent in what inſtances God is thus kind to the unthankful and the evil. Theſe would yield us a moſt ample ſcope, and indeed are not to be numbered: For what worldly comfort is there of the virtuous and devout, nay, what outward advantages of religion, in which the wicked do not either actually ſhare, or which they might not, in general, if they pleaſed, attain?

Let us obſerve them, in the firſt place, with regard to temporal things. Look out into the world, and conſider the caſes of the ſenſual, the unjuſt, the cruel, the profane, the blaſphemous. Is God, do you imagine, quick to puniſh, and no longer benevolent when once offended? What difference do you ſee between the outward ſtate of theſe men, and that of the virtuous and devout? Are they more frequently in pain? Are they more generally ſunk in poverty? Is it more uſual with them than others to meet with

with ſhocking accidents? Are they more liable to the loſs of friends? Are the clouds and ſun leſs beneficent to their fields? Or does the fiery bolt from heaven infallibly diſtinguiſh them, while the righteous head eſcapes? No; they have the ſame health, the ſame ſafety, the ſame proſperity and affluence with better men, ſo far as a particular providence is concerned, and abſtracting from the immediate and natural conſequence of vice. Intemperance indeed will deſtroy the conſtitution, and diſſipate men's ſubſtance; and violent ambition will ſometimes ſhorten life. So it may be ſaid of other ſins. Anger and malice are of great force to leſſen the number of our days. But the immediate hand of a particular providence is not concerned in theſe and other inſtances of the like kind; and I truſt ſinners will be more modeſt than to expect that God will work miracles, or ſuſpend the general laws of nature, to preſerve ſuch perſons as they are from the inconveniences of their own folly and madneſs. Whatever evils the offender may draw upon himſelf, and, as it were, force upon his own head,

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the general providence of God is much kinder to him than he hath ever deſerved. Our Lord informs us in a parallel place, that the Governor of the univerſe, our all-gracious and heavenly Father, "maketh his "ſun to riſe on the evil and on the good, "and ſendeth rain on the juſt and on the "unjuſt." So alſo the wiſe king: "All "things come alike to all; there is one "event to the righteous and to the wicked, "to the good, and to the clean, and to the "unclean, to him that ſacrificeth, and to "him that ſacrificeth not: As is the good, "ſo is the ſinner, and he that ſweareth as "he that feareth an oath." Afflicted Job, in the bitterneſs of anguiſh, maketh this appearance in the moral world the matter of his wonder and complaint: "Wherefore "do the wicked live, become old, yea, are "mighty in power? Their ſeed is eſtab-"liſhed in their ſight with them, and their "offspring before their eyes. Their houſes "are ſafe from fear, neither is the rod of "God upon them. Their bull gendereth "and faileth not, their cow calveth and "caſteth not her calf. They ſend forth

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"their little ones like a flock, and their "children dance;"—that is, they take all the ſatisfactions of eaſe and proſperity, cheerfulneſs, and mirth.—"They take the "timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the ſound "of the organ. They ſpend their days in "wealth, and in a moment,"—or without the agonies of a lingering ſickneſs,—"go "down to the grave." Nay, and after their death, to perpetuate their memory and gratify the ambition of their offſpring, they are honoured with coſtly, and, perhaps, flattering monuments. "Have ye not aſked "them that go by the way,"—the ſituation, as an excellent commentator obſerves, where monuments were erected in the days of antiquity;—"Have ye not aſked them that go "by the way? And do ye not know their "tokens?"

But with regard to thoſe diſtinctions which may be of real uſe to mankind, the divine benevolence ſtrives, by repeated favours, to ſoften the ſinner into ſhame. It preſerves him from evil, it ſupplies his wants, it watches over him amidſt ten

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thouſand dangers, and ſometimes grants him even uncommon and ſingular mercies. Did God beſtow upon him only a few favours, we muſt look upon it, conſidering his ill deſert, as a proof of very high goodneſs. But when he partakes of temporal enjoyments equally with the wiſe and good, when his comforts are preſerved as if he had never offended, and he is ſtill ſupported by the bounty which he hath ſo often abuſed, the goodneſs riſes beyond all expreſſion.

Take a view of human life, and conſider the prevailing conduct of thoſe beings, who every moment depend upon providence. Attend firſt to the morals of the faſhionable world, whom God hath raiſed above other men, and bleſſed with peculiar talents. In what a number of unmanly vanities are theſe generally immerſed; I ſay generally, for it is to be hoped that there are many exceptions. To what a croud of ridiculous, nay, ſometimes ſhocking vices, are their hearts enſlaved! They are ſo far from improving the ineſtimable leiſure with which they are diſtinguiſhed, that their invention is ever on

on the rack to deſtroy time, to rid themſelves of that anxious burden, and render themſelves incapable of exerting one rational thought. Unambitious of adorning their minds with knowledge, and cultivating thoſe virtues and graces which would give them the higheſt ornament, and raiſe them almoſt to the level of angels; they are engroſſed by the purſuit of thoſe outward decorations, in which they are equalled by ſome of the lower creatures, and far excelled by the lilies of the field. I acknowledge it is far from being always the caſe with the gay and irreligious, but too often, inſtead of imitating the divine kindneſs, and imparting out of their abundance to the poor and needy, they beſtow all, or even more than all, upon their own extravagant deſires, and their own craving and capricious follies. Inſtead of humbling themſelves for their ſins, and cheriſhing a contrite ſorrow, they feel no pain but from ſpirits jaded in the ways of vice, from the loſs of that wealth which they have truſted to chance, or from the violence of thoſe diſeaſes which they have contracted by the practice of iniquity. What madneſs

madneſs of rage do they not ſhow, what execrable impieties do they not utter, when diſappointed in their mercenary amuſements, and humbled and impoveriſhed by that Fortune, the imaginary and mutable deity whom they ſeem to adore! Ungrateful to God for their high ſtations or great privileges and enjoyments, careleſs of cheriſhing in return the graces of a devout heart, they too often laugh at all religion, ſcorn the very appearance of it, and not only refuſe the practice of it themſelves, but ſtudiouſly diſcourage it in others. In a word, they too frequently abound with lewdneſs, with ſcandal, with injuſtice, with malice towards their fellow-creatures; and are inſolent deſpiſers of God. This is the life commonly led by the great and the faſhionable, this is the conduct in which they pride themſelves, theſe are the deſtructive vices which they not only commit but ſtudy. And yet to ſuch as theſe, nay, to theſe eminently, is the divine benevolence extended. When they act ſo impiouſly, they could not have the power of acting at all, were it not for the goodneſs of God. Their breath is every moment

moment derived from his inſpiring energy; though they too often pollute it with horrid execrations, to the infamy of human nature, the diſgrace of their infinite Benefactor, and the general corruption of the world. Tho' they are ſupported by the providence of heaven, which liberally ſupplies them with all good, they atheiſtically chooſe to renounce their dependence, committing their poſſeſſions and their peace to mere hazard and chance. The ornaments which God gives them for the pleaſure and diſtinction of life, they madly prefer to that meekneſs which is an ornament of far greater price, to that righteouſneſs which is the moſt ſhining robe and diadem, to the friendſhip of God himſelf, and the hopes of eternal glory.

In the mean time genuine religion, from the ſmiles of which are deduced our nobleſt joys, is far from requiring any unreaſonable auſterities, from rendering it a duty to put on a perpetual gloom, or prohibiting one lawful, moderate, or manly pleaſure.

If we now turn our eyes to the middle ranks of life, what a ſilly reſemblance of the great in their vices, what giddineſs, what diſſipation, what intemperance, what a total dedication to pleaſure, and what ſad profaneneſs do we ſee on the one hand; or, on the other, what worldlineſs, what ſelfiſhneſs, what fraud, what defamation, what furious contention, what a thorough negligence and ſcorn of divine things, are conſpicuous in this claſs of men! And yet, that theſe are ineſtimably indebted to divine providence, no one can pretend to deny.

Shall we deſcend lower, and view the offences of the meaner and more neceſſitous among the human race? It may be done with great juſtice and propriety; for even the meaneſt of mankind are obliged to divine goodneſs, and have unſpeakable reaſon to be thankful. But alas! how diſagreeable a proſpect do we here behold! I am ſorry to ſay it, and remark it with equal tenderneſs and concern; but the poor, even thoſe who have ſome advantages for knowing and practiſing better, are too chargeable with

with idleneſs; with a ſad neglect of providing for ſickneſs and old age; with intemperance and ſenſuality; with rancorous envy towards their ſuperiours; with petulance and unthankfulneſs to their benefactors; with a vile abuſe of thoſe who diſcourage their lazineſs, and repreſs their other vices; with the moſt cruel malice towards each other; with a contempt of laws; with a wicked corruption of their own children, and nouriſhing in them almoſt every vice; with unthankfulneſs, murmuring, and impatience towards God; with a ſhocking profanation of his name and day, and a forgetfulneſs of eternal concerns. Nay, what would hardly be credited without the teſtimony of eyeſight, the neceſſitous are often very extravagant and prodigal, very inſolent and proud. It is dreadful, it is ſurely dreadful, not to be humbled by affliction. Extravagance, cenſorioufneſs, envy, and inſolent pride, joined with beggary, make up, ſurely, a moſt unſightly picture. I wiſh the original were not quite ſo common.

But now, let every individual conſider his own imperfections and ſins; let him that is even ſincerely virtuous and devout reflect in how many inſtances he hath offended his Maker, and yet how numerous are the mercies he hath received; and he will ſee abundant reaſon to be aſtoniſhed at the divine benevolence.

In ſhort, when we view not only the blemiſhes of the beſt, but the vice and profaneneſs which generally prevail among all ranks and orders of men; what could we expect but that God would ſhut up his hand, and withhold the bleſſings ſo dreadfully employed in oppoſition to his holy will? What could ſinners look for but a ſuſpenſion of all their comforts, the loſs of their uſual food and raiment, the interruption of the ſeaſons, and the moſt tremendous judgments, at leaſt of every temporal kind? What could they expect, in rigorous juſtice, but that the ſun would ſtand ſtill in the firmament, devoid of light and heat, aſtoniſhed, as it were, at the impieties of the creatures

creatures it preſerved, and weary of longer ſupplying ſo degenerate a race of beings?

And yet, all things continue as they were. All nature is buſy to ſerve us. The whole creation ſtrives to oblige us, and to remind us of Nature's God. In return for numerous offences, we receive innumerable favours. The good or beneficence of the Deity triumphs over our evil. He ſhews us that in ſpite of our eagerneſs to provoke him, his patience hitherto has not been wearied out: For we are not to imagine that it becomes the infinite Majeſty to exerciſe eternal patience. Sinners, in effect, though not with immediate deſign, ſtrive to wrench from his hand the flaming thunderbolt, and force it to fall upon their guilty heads; while he, inthroned in benignity, is intent to ſave them and preſerve them from ſelf-deſtruction.

Thou beſt of beings! who is worthy to praiſe, who is able even fully to conceive, the glories of thy boundleſs benevolence?

God is alſo kind to the unthankful and the evil with regard to their ſpiritual concerns. In this reſpect he hath ſhewn a kindneſs, which, without their ſin and ingratitude, had never been requiſite. The mercies of the preſent life would have been needful to their ſupport and comfort, whether they had ſinned or not; but thoſe of the goſpel were called for by their ſins alone, and, otherwiſe, would never have been needed. Nay, in reality, the very comforts of a temporal kind are chiefly referred to their eternal welfare. The ſun and rain are not only to light and warm their bodies and ſupply them with food, but alſo to ſupport them in a ſtate of trial, to warm their ſouls with gratitude to their Maker, to introduce them into the path of righteouſneſs, and prepare them for ſpiritual food. Every comfort of a ſenſible kind ſhould benefit their nobler part.

But if theſe gifts are ſo valuable for this purpoſe, what muſt be thoſe mercies more directly calculated and deſigned for this glorious end? What muſt be the birth, the

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life, the ſufferings, the death of our bleſſed Redeemer? What the remonſtrances of the holy Spirit, and the offer of his effectual aids to thoſe who ſincerely ſeek them? What are the advantages of the goſpel; the promiſes of heavenly glory; the continuance of opportunities long abuſed, and all the methods taken by a gracious God, to rouſe, to convict, to diſtreſs, to convert, and then to comfort the ſinner? Why is the offender admoniſhed, threatened, beſought, and called a thouſand various ways to repentance? Is not this kindneſs, compaſſion, condeſcenſion, and aſtoniſhing grace? If after all theſe benefits the ſinner be a ſinner ſtill, ſtill negligent of God, obſtinately bent againſt the divine will, and yet upheld by heaven in a ſtate of probation; it may well be ſaid, that God is kind to the unthankful and the evil. For ſurely a contempt of favours beſtowed in ſpite of paſt ingratitude, and a return for thoſe favours of the moſt inſolent evils and affronts; this is the moſt ſhocking, the moſt impious unthankfulneſs of all.

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The great Apoſtle of the Gentiles informs us, that though he had been a blaſphemer and a perſecutor, he was graciouſly forgiven, and then very honourably diſtinguiſhed. It is true, he at the ſame time remarks, that his great wickedneſs was acted in ignorance and unbelief; but this, though ſome excuſe, was no juſtification, as his ignorance was wilful, and aroſe from the moſt criminal prejudice. For this reaſon, notwithſtanding the plea of a blinded and erroneous conſcience, he very modeſtly, and indeed juſtly, repreſents himſelf as the chief of ſinners. "And the grace of our "Lord," ſays the ſhining convert, "was "exceeding abundant, with faith and love "which is in Chriſt Jeſus." Our Lord, in this, as in other caſes, ſhewed himſelf by the Father's appointment not only gracious, but exceedingly abundant in grace. Saint Paul proceeds: "This is a faithful "ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation, that "Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave "ſinners, of whom I am chief." Having thus exhibited and honoured the grace of the Saviour in his converſion, he points out a very

a very excellent purpoſe which would be anſwered by this important fact. "How-"beit, for this cauſe I obtained mercy, "that in me firſt Jeſus Chriſt might ſhew "forth all long-ſuffering, for a pattern to "them who ſhould hereafter believe on "him to everlaſting life." Let it not hence be inferred, that ſinners are to lie negligent and ſecure, and expect an extraordinary converſion like that of Saint Paul. That would be a ſad perverſion of this memorable hiſtory. During the infancy of the Chriſtian religion, this ſtriking reclamation of ſo noted a perſecutor was highly uſeful to do credit to the goſpel, and ſhew it's excellence to the inattentive world by a flaſh of the moſt glaring conviction. But God uſually works in a more ſilent and perſuaſive manner; and hath promiſed the influences of the Spirit to thoſe only who deſire and aſk them. Saint Paul himſelf tells us that the long-ſuffering of the Saviour "was a pattern," or encouraging example, only "to thoſe who ſhould here-"after believe on him to life everlaſting;" not to thoſe who either believe not at all,

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or believe without repenting; whoſe faith is preſumption, and whoſe hope of eternal life is madneſs. Let us then infer from this converſion no more than we are authorized to do by the great Apoſtle himſelf.

From a ſerious contemplation of this ſubject, we are led to reflect how excellent and perfect is the nature of God, who is ſo patient and kind to creatures ſo ill-deſerving. There is no paſſion or revenge in the Deity; and when it is ſaid that he is angry with the wicked, it is meant only that he diſapproves of their conduct, and will ſeverely puniſh the finally perverſe and impenitent. It is obſerved of men, that many of thoſe who are naturally the moſt benign and ſweet tempered, may yet, by frequent provocation, be ſoured and inflamed, and grow into habitual rage. But God has been perpetually inſulted, from the fall of angels down to this moment; and yet is now as benevolent as he was from eternity, and will eternally remain the ſame. We think it glorious in our fellow-creatures to bear with a few ungrateful and abuſive enemies, and

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to do them good. But, from the beginning to this time, many millions have offended the ſupreme Being, neglected his Majeſty, trampled upon his laws, blaſphemed his name, perverted his mercies, and, in effect, bid him defiance. And yet he is the ſame compaſſionate Being, and, ſo far as wiſdom will permit, ſhews his compaſſion even for creatures of this diſpoſition.

In the mean time, remember, that this goodneſs is not to be abuſed. Perverted benevolence, benevolence affronted and inſulted to the very laſt, will be found the moſt dreadful enemy. If God did not at length puniſh the wicked, he could not be ſaid to have any kindneſs for his intelligent creation. The irreclaimable and perſeveringly obſtinate, and they alone, ſhall moſt certainly experience that our God is a conſuming fire. Let the ſinner therefore not trifle with divine goodneſs.

As a conſequence of what I have juſt remarked, how powerful are our obligations

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to obey this glorious Benefactor, and receive the offers of his grace! The Deity, we acknowledge, is patient, long-ſuffering, and wondrouſly kind even to the ungrateful and wicked,—that is, during their probationary ſtate. But what do you expect beyond? Hath he been pleaſed, let me aſk you, to acquaint you with the ſecret how long your life and trial ſhall continue? If he have, your preſumption hath ſome excuſe; but if he have not, it would be happy if you could plead idiotiſm in excuſe of your delays. Make haſte therefore, and no longer delay to accept of the divine mercy and to keep the divine commands.

*Finally*; So far as we can, and ſo far as real wiſdom, and the circumſtances of imperfect creatures will permit, let us, both by a forgiving ſpirit and kind actions, imitate this matchleſs benevolence. It is ſo amiable and excellent, that, when properly conſidered, it cannot fail of gaining our admiration, and animating our hearts with the moſt lively deſire to reſemble it. I cloſe

cloſe all therefore with obſerving, that if we ourſelves imitate the divine benignity, we ſhall thus be enabled to underſtand it more thoroughly, to admire it more warmly, and to praiſe it more devoutly.

SERMON

# SERMON XVII.

## ON THE PECULIAR GUILT AND PUNISHMENT OF PERVERSE SINNERS.

*PROV.* xxix. 1.

HE THAT BEING OFTEN REPROVED HARDENETH HIS NECK, SHALL SUDDENLY BE DESTROYED, AND THAT WITHOUT REMEDY.

IF ſinners had nothing but the remonſtrances of their own minds to awaken them to a ſenſe of guilt, though even then they would have nothing to plead in their own juſtification, they would not be ſo inexcuſable as many of them at preſent are by means of their numerous advantages. At preſent they are frequently reminded of their ſin and danger; they hear the ſacred and unanſwerable arguments in favour of religion, and are often reproved for thoſe vicious and profane practices, on which they want either the prudence or reſolution ſeriouſly to reflect themſelves. They are ſometimes admoniſhed, in the ſpirit of meekneſs and the tenderneſs of compaſſion, by their

their parents or other friends, to forſake their evil ways. The moſt preſſing ſolicitations are uſed by thoſe whom they have reaſon to believe moſt earneſtly concerned for their welfare, ſeaſonably to draw them out of the paths of the deſtroyer, and lead them in the way of righteouſneſs. In the public miniſtrations of religion, young and old are ſtatedly and loudly called, intreated by the tenderneſs, and urged by the terrors of an infinite Being, to repent of their guilt, and fly to the arms of mercy. They obſerve the deformity of ſin painted in the moſt glaring colours; they ſee repreſented the amiable beauties of holineſs; they hear the perſuaſions of God's love and authority, of Chriſt's agonies, and the ſanctions of the eternal ſtate. To theſe may be added thoſe ſtill ſuggeſtions of the divine Spirit, which ſometimes whiſper to the conſciences of the worſt ſinners. God himſelf may be ſaid to ſpeak to them in the juſt reprehenſions and advices of their friends, and eſpecially in the remonſtrances of his own word, the goſpel: But he likewiſe ſpeaks to them with the voice of his providence, and reproves them

them as ſolemnly by his acts of government, as by the moſt nervous and explicit language. In the inſtances of mortality they behold around them; in the dreadful diſaſters they ſee lighting on other ſinners; in the awful alarms or approaches of danger, whether public or private, of which they are witneſſes; and, above all, in the ſickneſſes or other calamities which they perſonally endure, they are admoniſhed by a voice from heaven.

Let me now aſk, whether in reaſon it might not be expected that all theſe various, intereſting, and powerful reproofs would produce, always and certainly produce, a ſuitable effect? But our own obſervation will unhappily convince us that the caſe is very different in fact; and the inſpired wiſdom of the ſacred writer declares, in the text, that thoſe, who, in ſpite of frequent reprehenſions, continue untractable, and render themſelves inſenſible to ſpiritual concerns, ſhall be puniſhed in the moſt tremendous manner. "He that being often reproved "hardeneth his neck,"—or, having hard-

dened his conſcience, refuſes to bend to the eaſy yoke of religion,—"ſhall ſuddenly be "deſtroyed, and that without remedy."

That we may view this ſubject with proper improvement, let us conſider the manner in which ſinners harden themſelves againſt repeated reproof; the peculiar guilt, and the terrible puniſhment of ſo deteſtable a practice.

Sinners harden themſelves againſt frequent reproof, in the firſt place, by negligence and inattention. This, in reality, is the deplorable cauſe of moſt of the evils with which human life abounds. Among others, it is one occaſion of the ſpiritual inſenſibility repreſented by the wiſe man. Let conſcience in itſelf be ever ſo tender, yet, unleſs we ſeriouſly reflect on our true character and conduct, we ſhall not be concerned at the malignity of the greateſt guilt. Outward or natural objects can never be felt unleſs we touch them: And it is the ſame with ſpiritual objects, which are brought by reflection to the touch of conſcience, and the

the real qualities of which cannot otherwiſe be diſcerned. Unleſs reproof reach the conſcience, it will of neceſſity prove ineffectual; and it generally falls ſhort of it thro' the ſinner's inattention and neglect. Some offenders, however intereſting and awakening the leſſons you endeavour to teach them, yet, according to the expreſſion of the ſacred oracles, "have no ears to hear:" Or, according to a notion of the antients, to which the Pſalmiſt, in ſome paſſages alludes, "They are like the deaf adder, that ſtoppeth "her ear; which will not hearken to the "voice of charmers, charming never ſo "wiſely." But when inattention is thus prevalent, or grown into a habit, conſcience becomes ſtupid for want of exerciſe, and the ſinner, a ſort of ſpiritual paralytic, is deſtitute of all feeling.

Inattention to reproof is ſometimes owing to the predominance of pride and paſſion, and ſometimes to negligence of temper. The two former are great enemies to wiſdom both civil and religious. There are ſome perſons, who, if you hearken to the

opinion they have formed of themſelves, are too knowing to need inſtruction, and too perfect to require reproof. It is the language which Solomon puts into the mouth of a ſuffering and convicted ſinner: "How "have I hated inſtruction, and my heart "deſpiſed reproof!" Nay, when this ſcornful temper is riſen to a great height, we are excuſed, and even prohibited the exerciſe of reproof, both by Solomon, and by that teacher who was much greater than Solomon: "He that reproveth a ſcorner getteth "himſelf ſhame, and he that rebuketh a "wicked man getteth himſelf a blot. Re-"prove not a ſcorner leſt he hate thee; "rebuke a wiſe man and he will love thee." And thus alſo our Lord himſelf: "Give "not that which is holy unto the dogs, "neither caſt ye your pearls before ſwine; "leſt they trample them under their feet, "and turn again and rent you." Theſe prohibitions, I preſume, are meant to reſtrain us only from a private and particular admonition of ſuch vile and outrageous ſinners as will hate us for our kindneſs, and kindle into rage at our real endeavours to promote

promote their beſt intereſt. But this temper, when prevailing in any degree, is extremely hurtful, as it prevents their conſidering, and therefore their feeling, the well-meant reproof which they deſpiſe. When we deſign and endeavour all we can to promote the higheſt good of ſuch perſons, we do them an injury which they will ſcarcely ever forget.

But ſometimes, as I hinted before, the inattention of ſinners to reproof is owing to negligence of temper; to an abſolute ſtupidity, which is inexcuſable becauſe wilful, and which would render them in their worldly concerns the objects of univerſal ridicule. Perſons of this turn, if they are not actually aſleep in public worſhip, might almoſt as well be aſleep; for they are no more attentive to the inſtructions there delivered, than to words that are ſpoken at a thouſand miles diſtance. It is a great labour to bring many hearers to believe, or at leaſt to remember, that public inſtructions are not matters of mere cuſtom or form, but of infinite importance, in which every indi-

vidual is unſpeakably more concerned than in the food he eats, or the breath he draws. In the name of the eternal Majeſty of heaven I aſk, how comes it that there ſhould be any difficulty in perſuading a rational creature, that he himſelf is perſonally and nearly concerned in the inſtructions and reproofs of the goſpel? I aſk in the name of that tremendous authority, whether there be one individual who has not a ſoul, an ineſtimable ſoul, either to be ſaved or loſt? It is a truth of which no one is ignorant. Merely to think, is to know it in ſpeculation; but to forbear thinking, is madly to deny it in practice. If any one here preſent is deſtitute of a ſoul, let him withhold his attention from religious concerns, harden his heart againſt reproof, and ſin with the ſame levity as before; but otherwiſe it is worſe than madneſs; it is rank, deteſtable impiety.

Wonderful truly is it to obſerve, that ſuch multitudes of intelligent creatures ſhould be ſo totally loſt to reaſon, as never to be the better for admonition in their higheſt concerns, but always to receive it with the

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ſenſibility of ſo many ſtatues. Warn them with what energy you pleaſe; repeat your addreſſes 'till you are ſpiritleſs with toil, and diſtracted with vexation; admoniſh them of their idleneſs, their extravagance, their intemperance, their profanation of the ſabbath, and their other flagrant iniquities; and ſtill they are as eaſy, ſelf-ſatisfied, and obſtinately wicked as ever. They either attend not to what they hear, or elſe inſtantly ruſh into the tumult of ſinful pleaſure, and make it their buſineſs to forget the ſacred call. It is now no miracle that their hearts ſhould be hardened; the miracle would be ſhould they recover their feeling and receive the impreſſions of religion.

Sinners harden themſelves likewiſe againſt frequent reproof, by inventing ſophiſtical excuſes to make themſelves eaſy in guilt. Often contemptibly ſtupid in every thing elſe, in this particular they are ſometimes moſt wickedly ingenious in deceiving their own ſouls, and ſeconding the wiles of the tempter. They take occaſion, perhaps, from

the unallowed infirmities of good perſons, to indulge themſelves in every enormity; or fancy their own vices to be only innocent amuſements; or ſuſpect all religion to be mere pretence; or imagine they ſhall repent ſome time or other; or flatter themſelves with the notion that God is too good to puniſh; or endeavour to perſuade themſelves that their mere preſence in places of worſhip is an atonement for their guilt; or a thouſand other things, which it is impoſſible for any one to gueſs but themſelves, and which are an infamy to human reaſon. Sin may well be repreſented under the notion of folly; for, compared with it, all other folly is wiſdom. Such as theſe are the methods by which the reproofs both of God and man, both of providence and the goſpel, are rendered vain, and have not half the influence on the ſinner's heart that dreams have on ſuperſtitious minds. That we be not hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, is an expreſs and ſolemn caution of the inſpired writers, but, alas! to how little purpoſe.

Above

Above all other means, the continued practice and inveterate habits of iniquity harden the ſinner, and as it were petrify his heart. Other methods amuſe, or deceive it into inſenſibility; but theſe render it callous, inactive, unfeeling, lifeleſs. Sin, by frequent repetitions, grows familiar, the horror of it is loſt, and the conſcience is thoroughly ſtupified. The groſs indulgences, the outrageous enormities, which the young ſinner, the novice in iniquity, could not behold, or think of, without being ſhocked, are now counted as nothing. It is ſaid that poiſon, taken at firſt in ſmall doſes, and increaſed by almoſt imperceptible degrees, although it ſecretly undermines and deſtroys the conſtitution, will produce no immediately painful effects. Thus the poiſon of ſin is always infallibly and unavoidably fatal to the ſoul, but may come by a certain progreſſion to be quite inoffenſive to the conſcience. It deſtroys where it does not diſturb; nay, in reality, it is moſt deſtructive where it leaſt diſturbs. It throws the ſinner into a lethargy; it renders him

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inſenſible of his danger; it compoſes him to ſleep upon the hair-breadth edge of the bottomleſs pit.

Is it any wonder that reproof, though ever ſo clear, or warm, or ſolemnly addreſſed, ſhould be loſt upon ſuch hearts as theſe? You might as well reaſon with the boiſtrous deep, or admoniſh the fury of the whirlwind. They have no reſolution, no reaſon, no feeling, no hearing. Or rather, their reſolution is bent, is, and always has been, totally bent, in oppoſition to the dictates and intreaties of religious wiſdom. There is no perſuading the ſinner in ſpite of himſelf. If he is determined to be miſerable, he muſt be miſerable. If it is really his firm purpoſe to brave the Almighty, to oppoſe the artillery of divine vengeance, to ruſh impenitent before the throne of the Judge, to ſtand at his left hand in that dreadful day, to loſe heaven and all hopes of happineſs, to aſſociate with devils and the ſpirits of the damned, to pine in the darkneſs, to roll in the flames, and roar in the

the ineffable anguiſh and diſtraction of the infernal priſon—who can prevent him? Salvation indeed was provided for him at an infinite expence. The joys of heaven are offered him, they are preſſed upon him. He is invited, intreated, and beſought to receive them. It is very hard, it is moſt wonderful, it is ſhocking beyond expreſſion, that ſuch an offer ſhould be refuſed; but—he chooſes to refuſe it. It is his choice to be miſerable, and he muſt be miſerable. By every artifice of madneſs, by every habit of abandoned folly, he hardens his heart; he caſts reproof, with the moſt ſtupendous indifference, behind his back; miſery, infernal miſery, is the determined choice of his ſoul, and he will attain it in ſpite both of God and man.

And yet, as his hardneſs is voluntary and ſelf-contracted, one would ſometimes entertain a hope, in the anguiſh of compaſſion, that at ſome happy and more ſenſible hour he would alter his dreadful purpoſe, ſubmit to the reprehenſions of the ſacred oracles, and

and lay himſelf open to the impreſſions of divine grace.

Let me now therefore repreſent to him the peculiar and aggravated guilt of hardening himſelf againſt all reproof.

And I would have the ſinner in this caſe reflect, that he has no ignorance to plead but what is voluntary and ſtudied. It is the ignorance of inattention, it is the ignorance of determined forgetfulneſs, or of paſſion and pride; not of infirmity, not ariſing from the unavoidable want of advantages: For frequent reproof muſt manifeſtly imply the contrary. His ignorance is the blindneſs of a man, who ſhuts cloſe his eyes when ſurrounded with the cleareſt light.

Nor yet has he any forgetfulneſs to plead, but what is entirely wilful. When reproof is repeated, his forgetfulneſs can be no other than voluntary. When he flies to every amuſement, invents every artifice, to diſſipate his thoughts, and poſſeſs his ſoul with vanity; when he drowns his reaſon, and perhaps

perhaps even his ſenſes, in the filthy ſink of intemperance; when he totally unmans himſelf, and brutalizes, as much as poſſible, his rational nature; nay, when he runs into the gaieties of diſſolute mirth, or ſinks on purpoſe into the ſtupidity of indolence and thoughtleſſneſs, peradventure, juſt after he has been attending the ſervice of the eternal God,—can he poſſibly, with any ſhadow of reaſon, plead that he has only forgotten his duty?

It may be that at certain ſeaſons he has felt the ſtings of remorſe, and ſomething that has borne a reſemblance to a good reſolution, ariſing in his heart. Has he rejoiced in this appearing, though feeble ſenſibility to divine objects? Has he cheriſhed the happy impreſſion? No; he has rather been angry than pleaſed with his own conſcience, for ſtooping to what he accounts the meanneſs of humility, for diſturbing his repoſe, and interrupting his ſinful pleaſures. At leaſt, he has determined to ſuppreſs every promiſing emotion, and reſolved to be as hardened as before. Inſtead of falling upon his

his knees, confeſſing his guilt, and ſeeking for pardon and divine aſſiſtance; inſtead of flying to the compaſſion of a Saviour, and humbling himſelf at the feet of an offended God; he has had recourſe to his wonted relief, to the cup of intemperance, to the unmeaning or ſarcaſtic laugh of ſinful ſociety, and to all the intoxications of diſſolute and lawleſs pleaſure. Is this excuſable? Is not this wilfulneſs, obſtinacy, the moſt deteſtable and infernal perverſeneſs? It is worſe than brutiſh to indulge ſo impious a practice; but he, who, notwithſtanding ſuch indulgence, could remember his duty, and retain any good impreſſions, muſt be more than man.

Again; the inattention through which he hardens himſelf, is inattention to his higheſt and beſt intereſt. "He wrongeth his own "ſoul," he is his own deſtroyer in the moſt dreadful and aggravated ſenſe: Is it thought, and very juſtly, a moſt deteſtable crime for a perſon to be a ſelf-murderer; and are all poſſible marks of abhorrence affixed to the memory

memory of ſuch a perſon by civil ſociety? But, what muſt we think of that man, who, in ſpite of repeated warnings, and through the whole courſe of his life, does every thing in his power to deſtroy his ſoul, or expoſe it to unſpeakable torments? Surely there is no compariſon between the body and the ſoul. It is true, the ſelf-murderer is an abominable ſinner, puts it abſolutely out of his own power to repent, and ruſhes into the miſeries of hell. But this, perhaps, was occaſioned by a ſudden outrage of paſſion, by an overwhelming fit of diſcontent, or by a melancholy next to diſtraction. Whereas the careleſs and obſtinate ſinner, the ſpiritual ſelf-murderer, in the moſt deliberate manner deſtroys his own ſoul, and runs through a long and varied courſe of iniquity, though he knows the unavoidable conſequence to be eternal ruin. Having deſpiſed the moſt repeated and fervent admonitions, he can plead nothing to extenuate his guilt, but what will render that guilt more apparent and worthy of ſeverer puniſhment.

*Laſtly;*

*Laſtly*; His conduct beſpeaks the moſt determined neglect, if not contempt of the divine authority. A ſin committed through ſuddenneſs and ſurprize, may be excuſed, though never juſtified. But this is not the charge againſt him who is ſelf-hardened. The frequent admonitions he receives, whether from his pious friends, the miniſtrations of the goſpel, or the diſpoſals of providence, in all which God ſpeaks aloud to his conſcience; all theſe render it impoſſible that he ſhould plead ſuddenneſs and ſurprize. In a ſudden offence he may not have time to conſider the authority and the prohibitions of the eternal God; but in more deliberate tranſgreſſions, they are all, in effect, deſpiſed, inſulted, and defied.

Let us now conſider the puniſhment alotted for thoſe obſtinate and hardened ſinners, whoſe character and guilt I have hitherto been deſcribing. It is ſurely impoſſible for human language to expreſs, or for human faculties to conceive, a miſchief attended with more complete circumſtances of miſery than this repreſented in the text.

" He

" He that, being often reproved, hardeneth " his neck, ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and " that without remedy." What can be more dreadful than abſolute deſtruction, ſudden and remedileſs?

The ſuddenneſs of deſtruction denounced by the Wiſe Man was true, perhaps, in the ſtricteſt and moſt rigid ſenſe under the old diſpenſation; but it is true, likewiſe, in a very important and aweful ſenſe under the preſent œconomy of religion. It is poſſible, and not improbable, even now, that the hardened and obſtinate ſinner may be inſtantly ſtruck dead by an immediate ſtroke from heaven. But however, be that as it will, as he hath no ſerious thoughts of his ſpiritual danger, nor makes any ſerious preparations for a dying hour, his deſtruction, being unexpected, will certainly be ſudden, at whatever period it may overtake him. Nay, ſhould his laſt illneſs be ever ſo long continued, his hardneſs of heart will have all the efficacy of ſudden death, or render him equally and abſolutely incapable of ſin-

cere and efficacious penitence. Perſons of this temper never prepare themſelves for a dying hour, though providence ſpare them to the longeſt age of man; and when the aweful hour of diſſolution comes, they are generally incapable of pious reſolutions, although they have ſufficient feeling and tenderneſs left them to be ſuſceptible of the moſt horrid deſpair. How dreadful is their fate! They are allotted to be ſuddenly deſtroyed.

The term deſtroyed is the ſtrongeſt which language can afford to deſcribe the moſt intenſe miſery; for, upon the whole, we have no reaſon to conclude that the ſoul itſelf ſhall be annihilated in the future world. The puniſhment of the wicked, not to mention, at preſent, other circumſtances by which an idea of it is conveyed to us, is repreſented under the notion of the ſecond and eternal death.—But here human weakneſs muſt pauſe—nor vainly attempt to deſcribe the puniſhments reſerved for impenitent ſinners. It is not in the language of mortals

to

to expreſs the conceptions we are able to form of them; and all the conceptions which we are able to form muſt fall infinitely ſhort of the great and dreadful reality. But the ſentence of condemnation once paſſed, it cannot be reverſed by the united efforts of the whole creation.

Would God I could now, this inſtant, ſeaſonably prevail with perſons of ſuch a diſpoſition, to fly on the wings of repentance to the throne of mercy! But at preſent I can only remark, that their inſenſibility being intirely owing to themſelves, and not the act of an all-compaſſionate God; the divine conduct will be abundantly juſtified in inflicting on them the moſt horrible puniſhment. This reflection will be the bitterneſs of hell itſelf. This will be the gnawing, irritating, inſupportable worm that never dieth; and worſe, if poſſible, than the fire that is not quenched,—to reflect in anguiſh, that they have brought the miſchief on their own heads, and been the creators of their own hell. O that they were wiſe,

wiſe, that they underſtood this, that they ſeriouſly remembered it, that they bore it in their minds during the broad day of ſociety, and in the ſtill night of retirement, that they conſidered their latter end!

7 DE 61

FINIS.